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March 1909



AN
EXPOSITOR'S NOTE-BOOK; 37

OR,
BRIEF ESSAYS
ON
Obscure or Misread Scriptures. 0

BY THE REV.
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PREFACE.

IT has pleased God to grant me, for twenty years, a more quiet and sequestered lot than that which falls to most teachers and servants of the Word. Those years, happily for me, have been spent mainly in studying, translating, and expounding the Holy Scriptures; in forming an acquaintance with the large and various library we commonly call the Bible. 'The Book' is indeed 'the Book of books' in more senses than one. For not only does it include within one pair of covers an immense number of books written by men of the most diverse gifts and dissimilar conditions, during two thousand changeful years; but these books, by virtue of the lofty themes of which they treat, and of that Divine inspiration which gives life to every page, invite and repay study as none others do. Nor, I am fully persuaded—though in saying this I pronounce my own condemnation—is any man fully competent to expound any

one of these books who has not, in some good measure, mastered all. They are bound each to each by the most subtle, unexpected, and far-reaching links of connection. Joel, for instance, learned much that he taught from Moses, who lived a thousand years before him ; and the Apostle John, writing his Apocalypse nearly a thousand years after Joel's hand had mouldered into dust, borrowed some of his most expressive symbols from the gifted son of Pethuel : or, to take an instance even more remarkable, and more unsuspected perhaps by the casual reader of the Bible, the Gospels hardly record a single sentence or figure of speech employed by John the Baptist, the germ of which may not be found in the prophecy of Malachi the Messenger. So that he who really 'searches' the Scriptures with fidelity and patience, whatever sceptical prepossessions he may bring to the quest, is more and more impressed with the sense of a vital unity in them which can only be accounted for by the guiding and controlling inspiration of one and the self-same Spirit ; while he who has risen by faithful and patient study beyond the reach of doubt, although he will rejoice in the largeness and goodness of the land thrown open to his inquiring feet, is apt nevertheless to be afflicted with a despair of ever possessing himself of it, so large is it, so full of hidden wealth.

I make no pretensions, therefore, to be a competent expounder of any book, or even of any passage, of Holy Writ. Indeed, I feel more incompetent than

ever now that I have, and perhaps *because* I have, given many years and my best endeavours to the study of the Bible, and have carefully examined about half the books it contains. But in the course of these more continuous studies I have now and then lit on passages, mostly obscure or otherwise hard to interpret, on which I saw, or thought I saw, a little light. And on these passages I have written brief expository essays, some of which are now collected in this volume. Most of them have appeared in print before ; and, as they were usually written for Magazines designed for the Christian public in general, and not simply for men of culture and scholarship, they are popular, and occasionally even hortatory, in their tone. But most of them, too, even where they seem to handle only simple themes, are sincere attempts to deal with difficulties or obscurities, or to shew the worth and suggestiveness of passages which are commonly overlooked : the Parable of the Sower, for example, is not an exceptionally difficult scripture ; but I am not aware of any previous attempt to explain the very real difficulty suggested by the words in which our Lord gives his reason for speaking to the multitude in parables. In fine, as throughout these occasional papers, which have often been a welcome relief to graver and more exhausting labour, I have tried to render the Sacred Volume more clear and attractive to those who cannot give it the serious and continuous study it demands, I would fain hope

that, in this collected form, they may find some acceptance, and do a little good.

I need only add that the reader will be the more likely to benefit by them if he will be at the pains to read for himself the several Scriptures on which they are based; and that, wherever he finds any Scripture cited in other words than those of our Authorised Version, he may be sure that I have tried to give the sense of the original Greek or Hebrew more exactly.

NOTTINGHAM,

October, 1872.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE CROUCHER AT THE DOOR (Genesis iv. 7).	I
II. THE SONG OF THE SWORD (Genesis iv. 23, 24).	19
III. JOSEPH'S COAT (Genesis xxxvii. 3).	31
IV. JOSEPH IN PRISON (Genesis xxxix. 20 ; and Psalm cv. 17).	40
V. DIVINE ORDINANCES OF LABOUR (Exodus xviii. 13-26).	52
VI. KING BRAMBLE (Judges ix. 8-15).	64
VII. THE GOLDEN MICE AND EMRODS (1 Samuel vi).	76
VIII. DON'T CRY OVER SPILT WATER (2 Samuel xiv. 14).	91
IX. ONE HEART AND ONE STEP (1 Chronicles xii. 33).	103
X. THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID (2 Samuel xxiii. 1-7)	115
XI. LITTLE CHILDREN GOD'S STRONGHOLD FOR TROUBLED MEN (Psalm viii. 2)	131
XII. I WILL GUIDE THEE WITH MINE EYE (Psalm xxxii. 8).	151
XIII. CHEERFULNESS (Proverbs xvii. 22).	161
XIV. THE MORAL OF CHANGE (Ecclesiastes vii. 14).	171
XV. AN ODE ON THE FALL OF BABYLON (Isaiah xxi. 1-10).	183
XVI. THE ORACLE OF DUMAH (Isaiah xxi. 11, 12).	201
XVII. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (Matthew xiii. 3-23).	213
XVIII. THE PHENOMENA OF GROWTH (Mark iv. 26-28).	249
XIX. THE SPLINTER AND THE BEAM (Matthew vii. 3-5).	266
XX. ON GIVING HOLY THINGS TO DOGS (Matthew vii. 6).	279
XXI. THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS (Luke vii. 40-43).	293
XXII. THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST (Matthew viii. 23-27)	314

CHAP.	PAGE
XXIII. ACCIDENTS NOT JUDGMENTS (Luke xiii. 1-5). ▪ ▪	326
XXIV. MALCHUS (Matthew xxvi. 51-56). ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪	336
XXV. THE CROWN OF THORNS (John xix. 2). ▪ ▪ ▪	349
XXVI. SIMON PETER GOES A-FISHING (John xxi. 3). ▪ ▪	361
XXVII. THE PARTING BENEDICTION (Luke xxiv. 50-3). ▪ ▪	373
XXVIII. GIVING AND TAKING (Acts xx. 35). ▪ ▪ ▪	388
XXIX. POWER ON THE WOMAN'S HEAD BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS (1 Corinthians xi. 10). ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪	402
XXX. ST. PAUL A WORKING MAN AND IN WANT (2 Cor. xi. 9). ▪	419
XXXI. ST. PAUL AS A FRIEND (2 Timothy iv. 11). ▪ ▪ ▪	439

AN
EXPOSITOR'S NOTE-BOOK.

I.

The Croucher at the Door.

GENESIS IV. 7.

THIS passage, confessedly a difficult one, consists of three sentences or phrases which our Authorized Version renders thus: (1.) "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (2.) "And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." (3.) "And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." In the first of these sentences there is nothing to detain us. By common consent the literal translation of the Hebrew is: "If thou doest well, *is there not a lifting up?*" *i.e.*, a lifting up of Cain's fallen countenance; and its sense is sufficiently given in our English Bible. The difficulty is started by the third sentence, and is only to be solved, I believe, by an amended translation of the second. Throughout the verse Jehovah is represented as remonstrating with angry jealous Cain; and, in its final sentence, Cain is assured or warned, "Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." *Whose* desire is to be to Cain? *over whom* is he to rule? In this question lies the difficulty of the passage.

The answer to it which was commonly accepted in England half a century ago could surely have originated only in "the most *aristocratic* church in Christendom." It held that "the right of primogeniture" was taught in the sentence, and affirmed that it was Abel's desire which was to be unto Cain, that it was Abel, the younger brother, over whom Cain, the elder brother, was to rule. The answer is utterly inadmissible; and that for two reasons. It makes bad grammar, and it makes bad sense.

It makes bad grammar of the sentence. For a pronoun should agree with, and point back to, an immediately antecedent noun. The pronouns "his" and "him" in the closing phrase of the verse ought therefore to refer to a noun in the foregoing phrase. But we must count back seven complete sentences before, in verse 4, we light upon the name of Abel. And to leap over the intervening nouns and participles in this fashion is, to say the least of it, a very curious feat of grammatical gymnastics.

The reading makes bad sense as well as bad grammar. The right of primogeniture is, after all, a somewhat questionable right.* But were it never so unquestionable, if it be taught here, it is surely taught very much out of season and in singularly extravagant terms. Following and confirming the law of nature, Holy Scripture commonly speaks of a young man's desire as toward his bride, not toward his brother; it commonly teaches, not that the elder is to "rule" the younger son, but that both are to be in subjec-

* This so-called "right" is commonly based on the Old Testament Scriptures. It is remarkable, therefore, that these very Scriptures represent the Almighty as contravening the right of primogeniture in almost every conspicuous instance. Thus, for example, Abel, and even Seth, are preferred before Cain, Isaac before Ishmael, Jacob before Esau, Moses before Aaron, Abraham, Joseph, and David before their elder brethren. That surely must be a somewhat dubious "law" to which there are such constant and notable exceptions.

tion to their parents. The stoutest advocates of the right of primogeniture might well hesitate to declare that the first-born was to rule over his juniors as a husband over his wife, a father over his children, or even a chief over his clan. Nor, even if this "right" were to be pushed and sanctioned to its utmost verge, is this the place in which we should look for a formal expression of it. Jehovah is pleading with Cain against the murderous anger which was rising in his breast and hurrying him on to a deed most foul and unnatural. And what can be more incongruous, what more absurd, than to suppose this solemn merciful remonstrance rising to its climax in an utterly irrelevant remark about the law of primogeniture?

Both on grammatical and critical grounds, therefore, we must, I think, pronounce this reading of the passage to be quite inadmissible. Driven from one untenable position, certain expositors have taken up another. They have adopted Lightfoot's interpretation, which does not so much as touch the real difficulty of the case. Lightfoot proposed to read for "*sin* lieth at the door," "*a sin-offering* lieth at thy door." It is a sufficient objection to this emendation that, though the Hebrew word came to mean "sin-offering" as well as "sin," yet as sin-offerings, in the technical sense, were still two thousand years distant, it is not allowable to introduce a technicality of the Mosaic ritual into the history of the Adamic family. Moreover, the proposed emendation throws no light where we most need light; it in no way helps us to decide whose desire is to be unto Cain, over whom it is that Cain is to rule.

We are therefore shut up to a third reading which is sanctioned by most Hebrew scholars of modern times—by Gesenius, Kalisch, Keil and Delitzsch, and Lange, with many more. They say that the Hebrew word, which the Authorized Version translates "*lieth at*," is the participial

form of a word which means "to lie down, to recline," and is specially used of beasts of prey who crouch before they spring; that the participle in Hebrew, as in most other languages, is often used substantively; that it is used substantively here: and that therefore we ought to translate the second sentence of the passage, "If thou doest not well, sin is a liar in wait;" or, better still, because in a single word, "*sin is a croucher*"—"at the door." That is to say, the Divine warning to Cain is, that Sin crouches before his heart, like a wild beast lurking about a tent, waiting its opportunity to spring in.

Taken thus, we get the missing antecedent for the pronouns of the third sentence, though in this also it will be well to make one or two slight variations such as the Hebrew permits. The two sentences then read: "*If thou doest not well, Sin is a croucher at the door; and his desire is against thee (i.e., the Croucher's desire), but thou shouldest rule over him.*" With these emendations the passage yields a clear grammatical order; the pronouns "his" and "him" point back to "the Croucher" of the foregoing phrase. And the sense is as clear as the grammar. The Divine remonstrance mounts to a true climax. Cain is warned that, while he is nursing his angry jealous thoughts, Sin, like a ravening beast, as crafty as it is cruel, is crouching outside the door of his heart, only waiting for the door to be opened by any touch of passion to spring in; and he is admonished to keep the door shut lest he be overcome of evil. He is warned that the "desire" of the Sin, which looks so fair and tempting to the eye stained and discoloured by passion, is *against* him, that his only safety consists in subduing and ruling over it.*

* It is impossible without a disquisition on the Hebrew of this passage, which would be out of place here, to show how strong and conclusive are the arguments in favour of the reading given above. Here

Now taken thus, the passage contains a comparison and a warning which we may do well to consider. It compares Sin to a beast crouching at the door of the heart, watching its opportunity to leap in. It warns us that the Croucher's desire or lust is antagonistic to our welfare ; that, if we would do well, we must subdue and rule over it.

I. THE COMPARISON. There are two main features in it: craft and cruelty.

(1.) *Craft.* The first thing it tells us of Sin is, that it is subtle, full of wiles and "all deceivableness." It is like a wild beast, beautiful in outward seeming, lithe and graceful in its motions ; its feet shod with velvet, its strength robed in a coat of many colours. It is like a stealthy *crouching* beast, lurking in ambush, stealing unheard and unseen from thicket to thicket, or gliding softly through the long tangled grass, availing itself of every inequality of the ground, hiding behind every trunk or bush, approaching its victim like a fate—silent, invisible, unerring.

The similitude is terribly true, as we may see from the story of the very first sin committed in the world, a sin familiar to Cain's thoughts as to ours. The stealthy and masked approaches of the beast of prey are not more crafty than the arts by which Sin drew nigh to our first parents, making every available circumstance subservient to its design ; assuming a familiar and beautiful form, conferring on the serpent the noble gift of human speech, pretending probably that the serpent had won this gift by eating the forbidden fruit ; attempting the woman first, as the weaker of the two and the more susceptible ; for the man, adding to all other temptations the force of his love for the woman,

I can only give such arguments as the English reader may follow. He may need to be reminded or assured that the argument from the Hebrew is indefinitely stronger than that which can be laid before him.

who had already been overcome ; appealing at once to the strength of appetite, the desire for wisdom, the lust for rule ; casting doubt on the inviolability of the command which kept the way of the tree, hinting that perhaps God had not uttered it, and that, if He had, He might not stand to it, that it was a mere threat intended to hold them down, as long as possible, from the divine power and knowledge and blessedness of which they were capable. Like a croucher, Sin drew near their door ; and, when his wiles availed to open it, sprang in, and wrought our woe as well as theirs. They were beguiled from their simplicity. They were brought into bondage of evil ; and we have still to pluck at the bonds with feeble impatient hands.

As we study the record of Adam's sin, whether we take the record as historical or parabolic, we may see how true the story is ; how sin continually repeats one and the same deceit ; how we are conquered by the very wiles by which he was overcome. Into the body, taken from the dust, we are told that "God breathed *the spirit of lives*, and man became a living soul." This phrase "*the spirit of lives*" covers, as St. Paul held, three forms or modes of supersensuous existence : *the understanding*, which apprehends all natural phenomena, the whole visible universe ; *the reason*, which deals with the invisible and spiritual world ; and *the conscience*, which is conversant with moral relations, which pronounces this right and that wrong, which prompts to duty and restrains from sin. These faculties indeed pertain to man as man, and therefore we may fairly assume them to have been inherent in "the living soul" of Adam. And the assumption is confirmed by the fact that, even in Eden, he was provided with a sphere for the use of these various modes of activity, and availed himself of them. For the use of his understanding there was the whole circle of natural phenomena, the sun which ruled the day, the moon

which ruled the night, the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, the flowers and trees of the garden, to many, if not all, of which he gave "names" which summed up their several qualities; "what he called them, that they *were*." For the use of his reason there were the mysteries of his own nature, the invisible laws by which the universe is governed, fellowship with angels, communion with God, converse with the Eternal Word, "the Voice of the Lord," who walked with him under the branches and over the fragrant sward of the garden. For the use of his conscience there were the duties he owed to his helpmeet, to all other his companions, and to the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

So long as these several faculties wrought in due subordination and harmony, the senses being subject to the understanding, the understanding to reason, and the reason to conscience, man continued "very good," God took pleasure in the work of his hands. It was by violating this orderly subordination, by jarring its harmony into discord, that man fell. There came to him an hour of trial, a crisis in which his loyalty was put to the test. One tree, and only one, was forbidden him, under penalty of death. But its fruit is very fair; a mysterious fascination lurks in it, perhaps also a mysterious power. As he looks upon it strife and debate spring up in his "spirit of lives." Sense says, "The fruit is at least pleasant to the eye, and probably good for food." Understanding says, "It surely is a tree to be desired to make one wise." Reason says, "Ah, but the invisible threatenings of a Divine Command hang all about it: you must not touch it if you would." Conscience says, "To do God's will is always the highest wisdom, the highest good: do not eat of it, lest you die." Reason and conscience were the superior powers, and might have had their way. But here the tempter stepped in with his "Ye shall not surely die; ye shall become as God." And thus

reinforced, sense and understanding usurped the superior seat; the divine order was violated; and the violation of that order was death. For the death of *the man*, as distinguished from the death of *the body*, is simply the subjection of that which is highest in him to that which is lowest; it is the triumph of sense over the spirit. Once suffer that fatal usurpation, and the body becomes a prison in which the spirit lies bound and tormented, a grave in which it tends to corruption.

This is the story of the First Sin as it is told in the Sacred Record. And even if we read that ancient Record not as history, but as parable, not as a literal narrative of fact, but as a dramatic expression of the general human experience,—we must admit, we are bound by our very theory to admit, that the story is an over-true story; that it reflects the common experience of man. As Adam fell, so we all fall. As in him, so in us, the proper natural order of the human faculties is broken up by the imperious cravings of inordinate passion.

In our early innocent days we walk as in Eden. The earth is very fair and beautiful; all men are true, all women gracious and pure. Youth scouts the lessons of sage experience, and thinks no duty hard, no enterprise impossible, no pleasure dangerous. It moves on, full of delight and hope, as through the golden days of Paradise. But only too soon there comes a day of trial, the crisis which brings "the knowledge of good *and evil*." The importunate senses crave a gratification which can only be had beyond the bounds of law. The understanding whispers welcome flatteries of a good and wisdom beyond the customary reach. And though reason pleads the claims of duty and the blessedness of obedience, though conscience admonishes and threatens and brandishes her thongs, "Sin has a thousand treacherous arts" by which to beguile them.

The imperious appetites have their way. The forbidden fruit is plucked and eaten ; the fatal usurpation of the baser over the higher nature is commenced. And now eager youth, hot with shame, and seeking to hide itself from the Voice of the Lord, finds itself an outcast from the Eden of its prime. The fiery sword of violated avenging law guards it from his approach. A curse has fallen and darkened over the fair beautiful earth. The claims of labour grow stern, exacting, rigorous. Duty grows hard. All the brave enterprises, which once looked so near and easy, fade to an inapproachable remoteness. And now we can see the evil in men and women as well as the good, and begin to suspect other evils than we see. The Garden disappears or rises into the heaven of our dreams. All that remains is a barren earth, bristling with thorns and briars, which will yield us no sustenance except as we compel it by toil, a hard earth which is to be softened only by the sweat of our brow.

Is not this a true story—a story in which we all have played our parts, and still play them? Is it not *thus* that man still falls day by day? The due order and subordination of his nature are broken up. Conscience does not rule the reason as it should, nor reason the understanding, nor understanding the sensual appetites. The larger part of men are the obvious slaves of sense. No doubt they do in some sort cultivate the understanding. They seek to acquaint themselves with their fellows and the laws by which they are governed, with the properties of matter, the virtues and culture of plants, the habits of animals, and the best mode of breeding and rearing them. But what is their motive? Do they not, for the most part, study natural phenomena for the gain they may have thereby? Except only a few who are animated by a pure love of wisdom, they do not so much as aim at raising and purifying the

thoughts of men. Understanding, given to rule, has sunk into the mere slave and pander of sense, and is held in value in proportion as it gratifies our craving desires and appetites and lusts. Even of the few who love wisdom for its own sake, and hold physical appetites in rigorous subjection to the understanding, are there not some by whom the higher claims of the reason are neglected or denied? Are there not those who, while they study all natural science, turn with an unscientific impatience and distrust from that which is supernatural, from the truths and facts of the world invisible and eternal? Nay, even of those who are conversant with the invisible world, who study the laws of thought and the tides of passion, who speculate on the origin and the end of all things, on the abstract of truth and the archetypes of existence, are there not some who neglect the claims of conscience and fail in their duty to God and man?

Alas, the whole human world, from those in whom sense rules over all, through those in whom the visible and present exclude the invisible and eternal, up to those in whom reason is exalted over conscience,—all have violated the true order of their being, and come short of the glory God meant them to achieve. On every stage occupied by man, from the lowest to the loftiest, the inferior faculties degrade the nobler; and this mysterious humanity of ours, which once reflected the very image of God, is like a lake that holds a calm gracious heaven in its bosom; no sooner does any wind sweep over it than the unruly waves break the fair reflected image into a thousand distortions, and all the tumult of earth succeeds to the grace and serenity of heaven.

Our own experience has made us familiar with the genesis and progress of sin: *we* have fallen a thousand times before the very craft, the very device, by which our first parents were ensnared. The desires and lusts which

haunt the senses, and the understanding which holds by sense, demand an excessive unlawful gratification. At first reason and conscience withstand the claim. The repulse only whets desire and makes the craving lust more vehement. They return to the attack. If again withstood, they return again, perhaps under some new disguise, always with new force; till at last the resistance of reason and conscience is overcome, and some pretext is found for yielding to the clamorous desire. At times, no doubt, the citadel of the soul is taken by storm, the passions rising in sudden furious insurrection; but oftener it falls by treachery, or before stealthy and masked approaches. Reason and conscience, instead of being carried by fierce assault, are lulled to rest. No sign, no portent warns them of the coming peril; no torches flash on the darkness, no tramp of armed men invades the silence. The spirit, like the Master, is betrayed with a kiss, by a friend. Step by step the power of evil draws nigh; but no warning voice is heard. One of the band of affections which wait upon the spirit has been won over; others of them are weakened by long travail, or are sleeping for very weariness. And the spirit, taken at unawares, is led away captive, to suffer many stripes, to endure many strange indignities and griefs, perchance to pass through the grave itself before it be redeemed from its captivity.

Or, again: Sin clothes itself in fair disguises; it stands before us comely and attractive as the unfallen eloquent serpent. The lying spirit speaks through the prophets. Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Evil looks like good—better than any good we have yet known. It offers us pleasure, wisdom, power of a godlike strain; we have only to put forth our hands, and they are ours. Now and then, perhaps, the disguise is lifted by a passing breath from heaven. We still hear a voice sweet and melodious

as an angel's; but we catch glimpses of a grovelling serpent-form and the baleful hunger of its eye. We waver and hang in poise. But the voice sounds on; the charm works; our scruples fade; we begin to side with the tempter, and to frame plausible excuses for yielding to his allurements. We do not wish to be disenchanted. We insist on it that he resume his disguise. We see things not as they are, but as we would have them be. We call evil good, darkness light, bitter sweet. Deceived at first, we carry on the cheat, and end by deceiving ourselves. The sin that was outside is now within us. *The Croucher has crept through the door.*

We are not "ignorant of his devices." Our own experience translates these figures of speech into familiar ominous prose. *We* have been "drawn aside of lust, and enticed;" in *us* "lust has conceived, and brought forth sin." The edge and strictness of our scruples have been worn down; the force of high spiritual resolves has been frittered away; the charm of things pleasant to the eye, though not good for food, has grown upon us till we have "*consented* to sin." And therefore we feel our need of the warning suggested by the image before us. We know that every time we yield to temptation we become an easier prey to the wiles of evil; that every hour we neglect or postpone a duty we harden into a more habitual neglect. We know that, so often as we suffer him to approach, the Croucher widens the approaches to our hearts; that every time he enters he is more difficult to expel. *Do* we know it? Let us then listen to the warning: "Take heed . . . lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of his sin;" "lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve by his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and purity that are in Christ."*

* Heb. iii. 13; and 2 Cor. xi. 3.

(2.) *Cruelty*, no less than craft, characterizes the Croucher at the door. The most crafty beasts are the most cruel. They crouch that they may spring, and rend, and tear. And *Sin* is cruel, and fatal in its cruelty. If it crouch, it is that it may spring; if it spring, it is that it may destroy.

Revert once more to the first sin. The man and the woman whom God placed in the garden had but one positive commandment to fulfil, *i.e.*, they had only one method of testing and proving their loyalty to Him who had loaded them with benefits. Of all the trees of the garden whose fruit was good for food they might freely eat. Only one tree was forbidden them, and that because, whatever sense might say, it was *not* good for food. Prompted by sin, they broke the solitary injunction which restrained and defended their liberty; they turned their only test and proof of obedience into an occasion for insulting and defying the Majesty of Heaven. And that one sin unpeopled Paradise. It brought human life and immortality under the sorrowful obscurations of death. It reduced the whole creation into a bondage to vanity and corruption in which it groans and travails to this day. It gave a false bias to the whole course of human history. Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, slew *man*; for in Adam all die. Was not that a hideous and unparalleled cruelty?

Or glance at the sin of Cain. He had one brother, and he murdered him. The world was wide, but not wide enough for them both. Abel, "meek and gentle as the sheep he tended," was so good a man that God Himself "attested him to be righteous." But there is no ruth in sin. The very excellence of Abel, as expressed in his "more excellent gift," was the very occasion of which Sin availed itself to make Cain a murderer and a fratricide.

Proofs of the malignity, the horrible and insatiable cruelty, of sin may be found through all the subsequent annals of

the race. They are "writ large" on every page of the human story. But why should a sinful man, speaking to sinful men, adduce and multiply proofs of the cruelty of sin? We know its cruelty, for we have felt it. It has laid its fierce implacable hand on every one of us, lacerating all the nobler affections of the soul, opening wounds in some of us that will never close until we have seen corruption. There is not a man on earth who, were he to lay bare his heart, could not shew the wounds, and scars of the wounds, inflicted by this ruthless foe of our peace. If we are not sensible of them, it is because we are dead, because we have lost the proper susceptibilities of life. Once quickened, and we cannot but discover them, cannot but find that the Croucher has torn and bitten while it has fawned upon us. Old wounds will smart, and ache, and throb. As spiritual consciousness returns, it will be with us as with the wounded soldier left on the field, whose pains, mercifully sheathed for a time in swoons, rack and torture him afresh as life recovers its abandoned seat. The energies which we would gladly devote to Him who has quickened us, will have to be painfully redeemed from their bondage to death. When we would do good, evil will be present with us. Old habits, although renounced, will assert their power, and defeat our endeavours after holiness. And then, rising upon us through manifold infirmities, relapses, and penitent regrets, there will come the conviction that Sin has left its cruel enfeebling traces on our nature, and well-nigh unfitted us for the toils and honours of a divine service.

II. THE WARNING. "*If thou doest not well, Sin is a Croucher at the door; and his desire is against thee, but thou shouldest rule over him.*" The warning indicates our danger, and our safety.

(1.) It points out *our danger*. He who does not well is

very near to doing ill. A merely negative virtue is in peril of becoming positive vice. He who neglects opportunities of doing good, by his very neglect of them does evil. The holy war admits no neutrals; we must be for God, or against Him.

This is one thought suggested by the Warning; but it suggests another of a much more hopeful cast. For it implies that sin is external to man, not an essential part of his nature, but a foreign adverse power which has only an usurped authority; it represents evil as a croucher *without* the door, and capable of being kept out. "Sin is a transgression of the law" written on the heart as well as of the law engraved on tablets of stone. "He that sinneth *wrongeth his own soul*," and therefore does a great wickedness against God. Sin is not an inseparable element of our humanity, but an alien and separable adjunct. Only as we are without sin, or are redeemed from it, do we rise to the proper perfection of our nature. Christ was without sin, yet He was the Perfect Man.

We need to remember and to emphasize the fact that sin is not of the essence of our nature; for much depends upon it. It makes redemption possible; for how should they be redeemed from evil of whose nature evil is an essential and inseparable quality? It is because when we sin we wrong our own souls, and voluntarily submit to an alien external power to which we ought not to submit, that we are responsible and guilty creatures. It is because sin and manhood are distinct, separable, and even antagonistic powers, that Christ can take away our sin without taking away our manhood, that He can perfect our manhood by taking sin away. The Croucher lurks *outside* the door, and can only enter as we admit it; nay, even when admitted, it remains **an alien** from whose tyranny we may be delivered.

This is the hope which is implied in the Warning, and which lends it force; that the soul and sin are distinct and adverse powers, that we may be freed from the usurpations of evil without loss, nay, with infinite gain, to our humanity: and yet there is dread in it too. How can we think without fear of being pitted against so crafty and ruthless a foe? a foe who has left the print of its fangs and talons even on the best and noblest of our race? We may well fear the Croucher. God would have us fear him, that we may cease to do evil, learn to do well. For it is the evil-doer about whom the Croucher has his settled haunt. He that has once been drawn aside of lust and enticed may expect to be enticed again. The door that has been often opened, that still stands ajar, will not remain unvisited. The wild beast will return to its accustomed covert, even though compelled to leave it for awhile. The expelled demon, "wandering through dry places, seeking rest and finding none," will bethink itself of "the house whence it came out," and come back, perchance bringing with it "seven other spirits worse than itself."

It is very true that the Croucher lurks before all hearts, that at times it finds an entrance to every heart, that we are never in this world proof against its wiles and assaults. But it is our happiness to know that those from whose hearts the Truth has scared sin, though never quite out of danger, are freed from the worst and most perilous assaults whether of its cruelty or its craft. There is one presence which evil cannot enter. It cannot meet the eye of God. And as He who inhabiteth eternity also inhabits the humble and contrite heart, those who are lowly and penitent and delight in God are never long exposed to its malice. Sin has no more *dominion* over them, though now and then it stirs up unquiet passions to revolt. They are only in danger when they have grieved the Holy Spirit and caused Him to

depart. And as He never leaves them but for a moment, never forsakes them but that He returns in great mercy, their peril is soon past. The Croucher is not at their door often or long. But it is not thus with those who do ill. Only *in well-doing* can we commit our souls to the Creator. To be without God is to be in a constant peril. Every time we do one of the evil deeds which "proceed out of the heart," we open the door through which the Croucher leaps in.

(2.) The Warning indicates *our safety*. "His desire is against thee, *but thou shouldest rule over him.*" That the desire of sin is against, is adverse to, man is sufficiently evident. It banished Adam from paradise. It murdered Cain by making him a murderer. It has brought discord, defilement, death into our souls. So soon as the law of sin has begun to *work* in us, we have found it a law of death. Its desire is against us. And we have only one alternative. We must either subdue it, or be slain by it. We cannot escape the conflict. And the conflict begun, our foe will grant no truce, nor consent to any terms short of an entire surrender to its control. It is our only wisdom, as it is our imperative duty, to strive unto blood against the fierce passions and lusts of the flesh and of the mind. If we parley with them, they outwit us. If we submit to them, they destroy us. The Croucher cannot be tamed. It must be caged, starved, slain. "Let not sin *reign* in your mortal bodies;" "Its desire is against thee, but thou shouldest rule over it."

But how is this wily foe to be caught? how are the strength and fierceness of this cruel foe to be subdued? Truly if we were called to the task alone, we might well despair. Sin has too firm a hold on us to be readily dislodged. It has too often crouched both at, and within, the door to be easily kept out. But our comfort is that we are

not called to the task alone. He who warned Cain that the Croucher was at his door, would have helped Cain to repel him. And He, who warns us that sin is our subtle and implacable antagonist, will help us to detect its wiles and to withstand its assaults. It only needs that Christ shew himself on our side, and evil will not court another overthrow.

It was thought of old, it is still thought by some, that relics—splinters of the true Cross, to wit—are a sovereign defence against all things ill. But the true defence against evil and all that holds of evil is not the cross upon the breast, but the Christ within the heart. And this is a defence we may all have. Behold He stands at the door—the door so often opened to the Croucher—and knocks: and if any man hear his voice, and open the door, He will come in, treading in the steps of the Croucher, and with his pure and blessed feet obliterating the foul tracks of evil, making our purified hearts temples not all unmeet for his presence and service and praise. We have only to bid Him enter, and the Victor over sin will give us the victory.

II.

The Song of the Sword

GENESIS IV. 23, 24.

FROM the creation of man to the destruction of men by the Flood the current of human history flows in two main streams, streams which run apart for seven generations, and then commingle only to fall and be lost in the cavern of a common doom. On the one hand, we have the Cainites, that is, Cain and his descendants, busily occupied with the arts and inventions of life ; and, on the other hand, we have the Sethites, that is, Seth and his descendants, who remain "upright" in the Biblical sense, and do not seek out inventions, who hold fast their allegiance to God, and live the simple orderly life He ordained for primitive man. Even from the brief antique records which Moses has collected for us, the "books" which he quotes, and although we know nothing but the names of many of the men on either pedigree, a careful student may trace the course of each of these divergent lines of action to their culmination in the seventh generation from Adam.

Let us glance, first, at the one or two brief hints we have of the history of the younger branch of the human family the Sethites. When her third son was born, Eve called him Seth ;* "for," she said, "God hath given me another seed

* Genesis iv. 25.

instead of Abel, because Cain slew *him*." *Seth* means "the gift," or "the compensation:" his very name, therefore, indicates that he is to take the place of "righteous Abel," and by his piety to compensate his parents for the meek and holy son they have lost. But does he act out his name, and fulfil the mother's hope?

There are one or two indications that he does. When, for instance, a son is born to him, he calls his name Enos, "the weak or frail one:" and the choice of this name signifies, we are told, that at least in this branch of the human family the frailty of our weak human nature was recognized and confessed. But still more suggestive are the words which immediately follow: * "Then began men to invoke the name of the Lord:" for this phrase denotes a solemn and united invocation of Jehovah, the public recognition of "the name" of God, *i.e.*, of his presence and of so much of his character as He had then revealed: it *may mean* that *prayer* was now first added to the sacrifices which hitherto had been the only form of worship. And though at first we might suppose the phrase, "then began *men*," † includes the whole human family, yet a little thought will convince us that it can only include those of Adam's descendants who had settled round him. Cain had wandered away into the land of Nod. He and his, therefore, could have no part in the worship of the Sethites. While he and his children were building a city and seeking out inventions, upright Seth and his children were acquiring the supreme art of life, a common and orderly worship of the God of heaven.

The devotion to the service of God culminated in Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who "walked with God" in a

* Genesis iv. 26.

† The word "men," indeed, is not in the Hebrew. We might read, "Then began *they* to invoke," etc.

devotion so intense and perfect that, as the reward of his godliness, he was "translated that he should not see death;" he was made meet, while yet in the flesh, for the incorrupt and immortal realm, for the ampler service and sevenfold splendours of heaven.

Now let us glance at the elder line. When Cain was branded and banished for his sin, he complained:* "Behold Thou hast driven me from the face of the earth, and from Thy face must I hide myself." This "face of the earth," from which he is driven, was, says Keil, the spot, "where God had revealed his face, *i.e.*, his presence, to men after their expulsion from the garden," the one spot hallowed by the manifestation of the Divine Majesty and Grace. Cain felt that in leaving this, he left God and the knowledge of God; that the bond which had united the family of man was broken; that he must go forth solitary into a world all dark and haunted by threatening shadows. And here we have our first indication of the godlessness or irreligion of his race. They are, or they think themselves to be, driven from the face of the Lord.

We soon light on a second indication. Cain wanders, a fugitive and a vagabond, until he reaches a land which he calls "the land of *Nod*," *i.e.*, the land of "flight" or "banishment." He still feels that he is banished from the presence and favour of God, that the old bond of unity, broken by his crime, can never be repaired: and so, as the years pass, he tries to create a new bond. He builds "a city," an enclosed space with fortified dwellings. This shall be the symbol of their unity and strength, since he can no longer count on the presence of Jehovah. And in the erection of this city we have the first step of a course which men have trodden ever since: it opened the reign of invention. Architecture and fortification, or the first rudiments of these arts, were

* Genesis iv. 14.

invented by Cain : valuable as they are, or may be, it is to be feared that the motive of their origin was simply distrust of God.

Cain's tendency to trust in his own wit and strength, rather than in the Divine goodness which even his sin could not alienate, rose to its full height in Lamech and his family ; the intermediate steps of the progress being passed over by the sacred historian in the case of the Cainites as in that of the Sethites. Lamech is the seventh from Adam through Cain, just as Enoch is seventh from Adam through Seth ; and as in Enoch the characteristics of the line of Seth came to a head, so also the characteristics of the line of Cain came to a head in Lamech and his children. They invent the arts, but they also serve the lusts of the flesh. While the Sethites rise into "sons of God," the Cainites, despite their grand gifts, sink into mere "children of men."

And here, as I believe, we come on the explanation of a passage which has perplexed many minds, and which has, it must be confessed, a very mythical sound. "The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair ; and they took them wives of all which they chose . . . and when the sons of God came to the daughters of men, they bare children to them : these are the heroes who of old were men of renown."* For this is no fable, as some have supposed, of a secret intercourse of angels with women. Probably it is a simple description of the historic fact that, after the translation of Enoch, or possibly before it, the Sethites, the pious race which had not been driven from the face of God, also became corrupt, no longer suffered God's Spirit to reign in their mortal bodies ;† that they not only intermarried with the daughters of the ungodly race of Cain,

* Genesis vi. 2-4.

† Genesis vi. 3. "My Spirit shall not always reign in man, while he is also flesh."

but, following the evil example of Lamech, became polygamists, married as many wives as they cared to have—"all whom they chose," *i.e.*, all whose beauty charmed them.

From this point onward, from the union of these two races hitherto distinct, the shadows multiply and darken on the page of the human story. All men more and more walked after the flesh, instead of ruling the flesh by the spirit ; till at last they grew so utterly corrupt, the thoughts of their hearts being only evil all the day long, that it repented the Lord that He had made them, and grieved him to the very heart.

But let us return to Lamech and his family, the family in which the characteristics of the line of Cain effloresce with a splendour which still charms the world.

Although we have the names of so many men, we have only the names of four of the women who existed before the Flood. These four names are Eve, Adah, Zillah, and Naamah. The latter three are the names of women all of whom were members of the family of Lamech ; Adah and Zillah were his wives, Naamah was his daughter. And these names indicate that the original and noble conception of woman, as the helpmeet of the man, was being rapidly superseded by that voluptuous and degrading view which has ever since prevailed in the East. For each of these names emphasizes that which is merely superficial and sensuous, that which kindles desire. Adah is "the beautiful one," or "the ornament ;" Zillah means "shadow," and embodies an allusion to that shade from the fierce heat which is so welcome to those who have to abide the smittings of an Oriental sun : "and Naamah is "the sweet or lovely one : " they are all pleasant toys, and little more. The pure and noble ideal of the true woman, the true wife—such an ideal, for instance, as King Lemuel learned of his mother*—must have been very remote from Lamech's thoughts

* Proverbs xxxi. 10—31.

when he named his women thus. No mere "ornament," or grateful "shadow" was she of whom it is written: "Strength and honour are her clothing. She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. Her own works praise her in the gates."

Where Lamech's slight contemptuous view of woman is held, it is natural that marriage should degenerate into polygamy. He is the first of the human race who had more wives than one. The father of a family of inventors, this was his invention, his legacy, to the human race—a legacy which perhaps the larger half of men still inherit, to their cost and ours.

Of his children, Jabal ("increase") was the father of such as dwelled in tents, the inventor of the nomadic pastoral life; while Jubal ("sound"), own brother to Jabal,* was the inventor of the lyre and the pipe, the first rude forms whether

* It is worthy of remark that in the Bible, as in the primitive traditions of most races, there is this hint of the close connection between the happy leisure of the pastoral life and the invention of musical instruments. Walter Savage Landor, in a boyish poem long since out of print, has a few lines which suggest the process by which the shepherd is led on, naturally and easily, by the very conditions of his vocation, to invent the earliest form of the instrument of which even the mighty organ is but a development.

"By bounteous rivers, 'mid his flock reclined,
He heard the reed that rustled in the wind;
Then, leaning onward, negligently tore
The slender stem from off the fringed shore;
With mimic breath the whisper soft assay'd,
When, lo! the yielding reed his mimic breath obey'd.
'Twas hence ere long the pleasing power he found
Of noted numbers and of certain sound.
Each morn and eve, their fine effect he tried;
Each morn and eve he blest the river's reedy side!"

of wind or stringed instruments being made by his capable hands. Tubal-Cain (probably "copper-smith"), "a mighty man was he," and hammered out the edge-tools of the ancient world: while Naamah, his sister, is said by the Rabbis, to have been "the mistress of sounds and songs," *i.e.*, a poetess and a cantatrice, the first of *singers* in a double sense. A rarely gifted family this, a family to which all the world owes an enormous debt to this very day; and yet a wicked family—forgetting God, and relying on their own great wit and strength.

Yes, a wicked family: we need to remember that, and to learn from it that there is no necessary connection between gifts and goodness. But we should also mark how frank and honest a book the Bible is. It brands the children of Cain as the ungodly race: but the Bible does not, as foolish good men often do of their ungodly contemporaries, omit to mention the gifts they had, the service they did. It tells us how splendidly they were endowed, how much we owe them.

Let us mark, too, how even ungodly men may serve their race and be God's instruments for good, inventing arts which in purer hands become most helpful and ennobling. Nor let us shrink from saying that the inventors of song and poetry, of edge-tools and instruments of music, must have had much good in them, even if they had more evil. It was not their fault that they were born in "the land of banishment," or that their blood was tainted by the crime of Cain. It is to their credit that, even in the land of banishment, they invented arts which, for many of us, have re-opened the gates of Paradise and brought heaven nearer to our hearts. Had they seen what we have been permitted to see, and heard what our ears have heard, of the Divine Grace, we may hope that "they would long ago have repented" of their alienation from God, and consecrated their gifts to his

service. Even as it is, one can hardly forbear the hope that, if ever we are so happy as to reach heaven, we shall find the first poet and the first musician there before us.

But it is high time that we got to our song—a song which was first sung to the accompaniment of Jubal's lyre, the melody of which Jabal piped to his flocks, and which Tubal-Cain, the mighty smith, shouted to the rhythm of his clanging anvil. It may be translated thus:—

“ Adah and Zillah ! hear my voice ;
Ye wives of Lamech ! give ear to my speech :
I will slay men for smiting me,
And for wounding me young men shall die.
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
Lamech seventy and seven.”

This is the most antique song or poem in the world, the only poem which dates from before the Flood, the sole literary relic of the antediluvian race. Of course it has been read in many different senses, and its meaning has at times been darkened by those who assumed to explain it. According to some of the Commentators, Lamech is a murderer stung by remorse into a public confession of his guilt. According to others, he, the polygamist, acknowledges that his sin will bear a more fruitful progeny of ills than that of Cain, that polygamy will prove more fatal to human peace than murder. One of the fathers handles this song with rare ingenuity. He conceives it to mean that as Cain's sin increased for *seven* generations, and was then washed away by the deluge ; so Lamech's sin would be followed in the *seventy-seventh* generation by the advent of Him who taketh away the sin of the world. But, as usual, the Rabbis bear off the palm, their traditions being even more ingenious and elaborate than any of the patristic conjectures. Their tradition runs thus :—“Lamech was blind, and Tubal-Cain was

leading him: and he (Tubal-Cain) saw Cain, and he appeared unto him like a wild beast; so he told his father to draw his bow, and he slew him. But when Lamech knew that it was Cain, his ancestor, whom he had shot, he smote his hands together, and struck his son between them, so that he also died." His wives, horror-stricken, withdrew from him: and *this* is the song he sings to conciliate them and win them back. And, then, the Rabbis so translate the song as to make it harmonize with their tradition.

There are many more, and more rational, interpretations of this antique poem; and of course it would ill become any one to decide with authority where doctors differ. But the interpretation which the ablest critics are rapidly adopting, and which I hold to be incomparably the best, is that which names it "the Song of the Sword." Whatever else may be doubtful, this seems certain, that Lamech is in a vaunting humour as he sings; that he is boasting of an immunity from vengeance superior to that of Cain; and that, because of some special advantage which he possesses, he is encouraging himself to deeds of violence and resentment. Now, just before the song of Lamech we have the verse which narrates that Tubal-Cain had learned to hammer out edge-tools in brass and iron. Suppose this great smith to have invented a sword or a spear, to have shewn his father how effective and mortal a weapon it was, would not that have been likely to put Lamech into the vainglorious mood which inspires his poem? May we not rationally conclude that his song is "the Song of the Sword;" that, as he wields this new product of Tubal-Cain's anvil, Lamech feels that he has a new strength and defence put into his hand, a weapon which will make him even more secure than the mark of God made Cain? The most learned scholars and the most competent critics think we may so conclude. They hold that this ancient song expresses "that Titanic arrogance of

which the Bible says that force is its god (Hab. i. 2), and that it carries its god (*i.e.*, its sword) in its hand (Job xii. 6).”*

Assuredly, this interpretation falls in very happily with all that we know of the Cainites, and of Lamech, in whom their characteristic qualities culminated. While the children of Seth, the sons of God, rose to the pure saintly devotion of an Enoch, who lived and moved and had his being in God, the children of men, the sons of Cain, produce as the flower of their race a Lamech, who makes his sword his god; who struts before his harem brandishing this new terrible weapon, and boasting that henceforth he will take vengeance, not sevenfold, but seventy times seven, on all who may thwart or injure him. We have only to put these two men, Enoch and Lamech, side by side, in order to bring into the most striking contrast the characteristic differences of the two antediluvian races; the boastful arrogance and violence of Lamech’s song is the true foil to the sacred and divine composure of the man who “walked with God, and was not, because God took him.”

In the old world, then, as in the new, there were evil men and good men—men who walked in a vain show, and men who walked in a constant and growing concord with Him who is the “Author of Peace in his holy places.” In Lamech we have only the extreme type of a large class,—men who take the sensuous view of life. These are they who, without intentional or deliberate wickedness perhaps,

* Delitzsch *in loco*. This conjecture gathers new force if we accept Ewald’s derivation of Lamech’s name. Ewald derives it from an Arabic root, which “expresses the idea of *snatching* or *robbing* ;” and maintains that the very name indicates him to have been “a predatory savage,” the freebooter of the ancient world. The “Song of the Sword” would be singularly appropriate in such a mouth.

forget God, who quietly and habitually ignore Him ; whose real trust is in their own strength and wit ; who believe wisdom to be a defence, and wealth a defence, and trained and organized power a defence, and that they need not go beyond these. They are sufficient to themselves, whether in the toil and conflict of life, or in its hours of ease and relaxation. They can find all the delights they need in music, or poetry, or some of the kindred arts which wait to minister at their call ; and they never or rarely rise beyond these, never taste the joys of a spiritual communion with God, or look forward with desire to the services and felicities of the heavenly world.

Enoch also is a type of character—the type of those who take the spiritual as distinguished from the sensuous view of human life ; who, while they bear their part in all the labours that are done under the sun, seek in everything they do to do it as to God ; and while they frankly accept all the recreative and refining ministries devised by the art or wit of man, accept them as the gifts of God, and so find an added sweetness in them. Like Enoch, they walk with God through all the difficult and tangled paths of life, are sustained by Him in the hours of their weakness, guarded by Him in their times of peril, and find their fellowship with Him grow more intimate, more ennobling, more consolatory, year by year.

The end of these respective lines of action is set forth in the several fates of Lamech and Enoch. In Enoch we see the spiritual man rising into the heaven which his life has prepared him to inherit and enjoy : while in Lamech and his children we see the servants of sense sink into the doom for which their course and habits of life had fitted them,—their thoughts growing more evil, their deeds more corrupt, until the flood arose and swept them away. Each goes to *his own place*.

The same great moral forces, which worked on to widely separate issues in the antediluvian world, are now at work among us. Evil and good, death and life, both are with us, both still striving together on the earth. But, thank God, *we* may look for a happier close to the conflict than that ancient close. Evil triumphed then, and death ; but through the grace of Him who tasted death for every man, and came to destroy every evil work, we know that in "the end" which is now approaching, evil will be overcome of good, and death be swallowed up of life ; that it will not repent God that He ever made man on the earth, nor grieve Him to the heart, but that there will be a divine and eternal joy in the presence of God over "the nations of the saved."

III.

Joseph's Coat

GENESIS XXXVII. 3.

THE voice of Truth should always be musical to us and welcome. Even when it corrects our most familiar and habitual conceptions, we should be glad to hear it, accepting as friendly service whatever helps to bring our thoughts into a closer correspondence with truth and fact. As servants and lovers of Him who is the truth, we profess that it is thus with us ; that we are very willing to relinquish all inaccuracies of thought, very happy to rise to a more exact apprehension of any Scriptural fact or dogma. Yet we do not find it easy to act out our profession. It takes a good deal to persuade us, for instance, that our view of any Christian doctrine is imperfect ; it often takes still more to convince us that we have misconceived any Biblical fact which has long since taken form in our imaginations. Of all our faculties, perhaps, the imagination is the most reluctant to part with any of its treasures, the most averse to change. The fact we have misconceived may be of no doctrinal or historical moment ; but if it has laid hold of the heart, if it has taken a certain place and shape in our imagination from childhood, it requires even a painful effort on our part before we can relinquish it, or so much as modify our conception of it.

Joseph's "coat of many colours" has thus seized the popular imagination. It is familiar to us all. We have heard of it, and pictured it, from our earliest years. It has become part of our mental furniture. The most distant and figurative allusion to it is promptly taken. Possibly we have thought it very foolish of Jacob to distinguish one of his sons above the rest. We have very probably thought it absurd that a lad of seventeen should strut about in peacock hues, and that grown men should be moved to passionate anger by his gay robe instead of laughing at it and at him for wearing it. Vulgar prints, in which Joseph's coat is depicted as though it had been cut from a patchwork quilt, may have offended our eyes. But, none the less, the coat of many colours has had, and has, a certain sacred charm for us. We have conceived of it as blending rich varied hues into a beauty and magnificence resembling those of the shawls, and tunics, and imperial robes woven in Indian looms. Joseph without his coat would be as strange to us as Moses without his rod or David without his harp. True, nothing of any importance hangs by his coat, no dogma, no theory ; but it has its place in our imagination, and we do not like to let it go. We could better spare a better thing.

And yet how can we keep it? How, at least, can we refuse to modify our conception of it? It was *not* a coat of many colours, although our Authorised Version says it was. The Hebrew words mean simply, "a tunic reaching to the extremities," as, I believe, no one who has looked at them will dispute. The words describe a garment such as was commonly worn in Egypt and the adjacent lands—a long white linen robe extending to the ankles and wrists, and embroidered with a narrow stripe of colour round the edge of the skirt and the sleeves. And if this white linen garment be but a poor substitute for the rich gorgeous robe which has so long held its place in our thoughts, it has its

compensations. For it helps us to understand the envy, the fierce murderous jealousy, of Joseph's brethren. That they should be moved to kill him, or even to sell him for a slave, because he wore a gay coat and went fine, is almost inconceivable ; but this long linen tunic meant more than a mere coat of many hues. It was worn, as a rule, only by the most noble and opulent classes, by king's sons and daughters, by priests and scribes, by those who were exempt from manual labour. All who had to toil for their daily bread wore short coloured garments which would not easily stain and did not hamper the free movement of the limbs. In their primitive shepherd life the sons of Jacob must have had much rough laborious work to do. They had to wander through a pastoral and sparsely peopled region, feeding their flocks wherever they found grass for them to graze ; they had to climb mountains, to cross streams swollen with rain, to contend with the "evil beasts" and birds which preyed on their kids and lambs, to shear sheep and fodder cattle, to draw water from deep wells, to plough and sow, to mow grass and reap corn, to drive back marauding Arabs, to endure the keen frosts of Syrian winters and the fierce heat of the summer sun. The long linen robes of the learned and royal classes would have been inappropriate and cumbersome to them. And when Jacob gave Joseph such a robe, he very plainly declared that, however rough and hard the work they had to do, this son of his love was to be exempted from the toils in which their lives were spent ; that he was to live easily and softly, and to be guarded from rough weather. And it is not hard to understand how they would resent that.

We must bear in mind too that, in those times, the father was the ruler, the despot, of the family ; that at his option or caprice he could make any one of his sons, even the youngest, heir to his wealth and blessing. Joseph's brethren

would remember that both their father Jacob and their grandfather Isaac had been younger sons; yet the inheritance had devolved on them. And when they saw Joseph tricked out in his robe of state, set apart and set above them from his youth, they must have felt that in all probability he would inherit their father's property and position, while they would be left to shift for themselves or to sink into his dependants. That could not have been a pleasant prospect to strong passionate men like Judah, and Reuben, and Levi, who were very conscious that by their thrift and skill they had done much to augment the value of their father's flocks and herds. And when this dainty lad of seventeen began to tell tales of them; when Joseph began to bring "their evil report" to their father, to dream dreams of his superiority over them, it is no wonder that their wild Eastern blood took fire, and that they resolved to put a bloody close to his tales, and dreams, and pretensions. They had borne that their father should "love Joseph more than all his children;" but that when Joseph was seventeen years old, of an age therefore to lighten their labours by sharing them, his father should deck him out in a garment which plainly said that, instead of partaking their labours, he should rule over them, this was more than they would brook.

Had Joseph's linen tunic anything to do with his dreams? I think it had. For a lad just budding into manhood,—and a Syrian lad of seventeen is a man, and often a married man,—singled out for special honour, may very naturally have had great thoughts of himself, thoughts which would give colour even to his dreams. At first he dreams* that, with his brothers, he is binding sheaves in a field; and, lo, his sheaf stands upright, while their sheaves gather round and fall down before it! The dream was simply a figura-

* Gen. xxxvii. 5—8

tive expression of the actual facts of his life and theirs. He did stand aloof and upright in his dress of honour, while they were bending in labour and ministering unto him. Father Jacob is not angry with this dream, although his sons are angry; it falls in with his scheme and intention. But, when Joseph dreams "a dream more," when he dreams* that the sun and the moon, as well as the eleven stars—his father and mother, that is, as well as his brethren—bow down before him and make obeisance, Jacob is then angry enough. For, though Jacob meant that his children should do obeisance to Joseph, he had no intention of doing obeisance himself.

Altogether, one fears that the household at Hebron was not a happy one, nor happily ordered. Isaac is fast sinking toward the grave. Rachel has lost her life in giving life to Benjamin. Leah, Billah, and Zilpah are much taken up with the claims of their respective sons, and love each other as three wives in one tent are likely to do. Jacob is very fond of Joseph—very proud of him; but he has a little fear of him, as well as much occasional anger. Joseph is "assotted" on his white tunic and flattering dreams; while his brethren resent their father's preference for him, and brood over schemes of revenge. Not a happy, not a well-ordered household, although it is the household of him who is a prince with God and prevails.

Joseph's two dreams are really one. The second is only a repetition of the first in a higher and more absolute form. In the first, his sheaf stands in the middle of the field, while the other sheaves stand round about and make obeisance to it. In the second, Joseph stands in the middle of the universe, while the sun, and the moon, and the stars make obeisance unto him. What they both came to is simply this; that Joseph is the centre round which all things turn;

* Gen. xxxvii. 9—11

that he is a very important person, and that all things have the honour to serve him. So high are the thoughts, so lofty and self-regarding the ambitions which that unlucky white tunic has put into his head.

Yet, after all, is not this the common dream of youth? Have we not all dreamed it, splendid and selfish as it is? Unless we have been fretted with petty cares, and worn down with mean toils amid base conditions from our earliest years, do not we all don Joseph's white tunic in our youth and dream of a greatness sole and peculiar to ourselves? When the energies of life move freely and harmoniously within us, does not the future stretch out before us in widening vistas all bright with the golden hues of hope? Do we not look out upon the world with fresh eager eyes, and feel that, beautiful as it is, it is nevertheless ours? Ah, how great and successful we are to be! How noble and heroic! How much good we are to get and do! What happiness we are to give and to enjoy! The heavens smile upon us with a constant benediction; the earth laughingly offers us all her wealth. Men, ah, how brave and good they are! and women, ah, how fair and pure! Why should any one fret, or doubt, or fear? And, above all, why should *we*, to whom God has given gifts, and talents, and sweet secret fountains of hope and bliss not conferred on all, perhaps not on many?

We have all dreamed this dream, I take it, and have found it to be only a dream. The white tunic has only too soon been stained. Like Joseph, we have soon had to gird up its long skirts, and to take our part in the work and the suffering of the world. We have been sold, or—in this more unhappy than Joseph—we have sold ourselves, into the captivities of evil. Great temptations have assailed us as a great temptation assailed him; and we have not always had the grace either to fight it down or to “flee forth.”

When we *have* refused to sin against God and man, when we have denied our strongest passion in order that we might do the right, the reward has been as long in coming to us as it was to him, or it has not seemed to come at all. We awake out of our dream, and instead of being strong we are weak ; we poorly fill a lowly place instead of sitting at the centre of the universe with sun, moon, and stars making obeisance to us. As the flush of youth dies out of us, the bright heavens are often clouded, and the bountiful earth reluctantly yields us only a niggardly return for our toil. We discover much that is weak and cowardly in those who were once our heroes ; our very heroines grow imperfect and dubious to us. We have done hardly any of the good we thought to do. We find self-conquest very hard, and the conquest of the world altogether impossible. We are content now if we can only muster strength for the task of the passing day, and get a little quiet rest at night. We no longer dream of doing great things for God and man, or of compelling all things to submit to our will and to contribute to our pleasure.

Now this, although a most painful, is a most gracious disenchantment. If it dissipates our early dreams, it should substitute for them a waking and eternal reality which infinitely surpasses them. Joseph's dream came true, though his white tunic was soon soiled with the sand of the desert pit and with the blood of the goat's kid. Joseph's dream came true, though it was fulfilled in a way and by means too wonderful for him to anticipate. Instead of simply succeeding to his father's inheritance, and ruling his eleven brethren, he stood next to Pharaoh, and governed busy populous Egypt. His father and brothers did make obeisance unto him. Nay, the very sun and moon, which govern the tides and rains, and mete out years of famine and years of plenty, even these served him and helped him to

the throne. Through the pit and the prison, by the path of sorrow and captivity, he rose to be the very centre of the world ; for "all the world went down into Egypt to buy corn of Joseph."

And, in like manner, *our* loftiest and most sanguine dreams come true, if only we suffer our early disappointments and failures to have their proper effect upon us. Setting out in life with high thoughts of ourselves, we are taught our weakness, that we may learn to make the Almighty God our strength and put our trust in Him. If we learn the lesson—if, when men disappoint us, we turn to God—if, when we discover how weak we are, how sinful, how incompetent to realize our own ideals, we also discover how good and strong He is, and ask Him to make us what He would have us be, then our loftiest thoughts, our brightest hopes, are far outdone. For God has high thoughts of us and for us. It is his design to crown us with glory and honour, to give us dominion over the works of his hands, to put all things under our feet. All things become ours as we become his in Christ, whether life or death, things present or things to come. Sun, moon, and stars—the whole universe makes obeisance to us and becomes serviceable to us so soon as we take our true place. So soon as we acknowledge ourselves to be his children, so soon as we suffer the Son to make us sons, we inherit all things, and our dream, like Joseph's, is fulfilled.

No words are truer than those in which Cowper has described the position and heritage of the man who is restored to the love of God by faith in Jesus Christ :—

"He looks abroad into the varied fields
Of Nature, and though poor, perhaps, compared
With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,
Calls the delightful scenery all his own.
His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
And the resplendent rivers. His to enjoy

With a propriety that none can feel
But who, with filial confidence inspired,
Can lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
And, smiling, say, 'My Father made them all.'"

To us, with the dreams of youth lying shattered and broken around us, life may often seem intolerably flat and unprofitable ; and even the comely face of Nature may wear no smile for us, her bountiful hands hold forth no gift that we shall care to take. But if we learn to call God our Father, a broad flood of light and hope is forthwith shed upon our life and over the world—a light which will never fade, a hope that will never make us ashamed. *Then* our dream will come true to-morrow if not to-day, and we shall sit with God in the centre of the universe, sun, moon and stars making their obeisance to Him and to us.

IV.

Joseph in Prison.

GENESIS XXXIX. 20; and PSALM CV. 17.

THERE are many passages in the later books of the Bible which supplement the narratives given in the earlier books, and throw new light upon them. These supplementary scriptures have hardly attracted the attention they deserve. The truth is, they are hidden away in those obscure nooks and corners of the Inspired Word which we seldom visit; and if by happy chance we light upon them, it would take more labour than we always care to expend to look up the narratives they illustrate, and to compare these with those. Let us try to rescue one of these supplementary scriptures from the general neglect which has befallen it. It is not so striking as many others: nevertheless, or I am much mistaken, it will give us a new conception of a familiar incident in the life of Joseph,—a conception we could not have gathered from his biography in the Book of Genesis.

I. That biography, in its general outline at least, is more familiar to us than most of the Old Testament stories; it is enshrined among our earliest and most pleasant memories. We all know that Joseph was his father's darling; that, moved by envy, his brethren sold him to the Ishmaelite

merchants ; that the Ishmaelites carried him down to Egypt, and sold him for a slave to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard ; and that, for refusing to lend himself to the lust of Potiphar's wife, he was cast into " the prison, a place where *the king's* prisoners were bound." Possibly, too, we think ourselves intimate with the incidents of his prison life. We know that he gained the good-will of his gaoler ; that he interpreted the dreams of the king's cup-bearer and the king's baker, who were " with him in ward ;" and that, " at the end of two full years," he was released from his dungeon that he might interpret the dream of Pharaoh.

But if we have taken our whole impression of his prison-life from the Book of Genesis, our impression cannot be either accurate or complete. For, though the inspired narrative tells us that Joseph was *bound*,* though it records his earnest entreaty that the cup-bearer, when he was released, would do his utmost to deliver him,† though it represents him as speaking with a certain bitterness of having done nothing to deserve that he should be thrust into *this hole*,‡ though, therefore, it implies that Joseph was the victim of a gross injustice, and had a keen sense of the injustice done to him,—it nevertheless leaves the impression on our minds that, for a prisoner, his condition was a singularly happy one, that he enjoyed an altogether exceptional freedom, and rose to no small measure of official place and dignity. " The Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison com-

* Genesis xl. 3.

† Genesis xl. 14, 15.

‡ Genesis xl. 15. " Here also have I done nothing that they should put me into *the dungeon*." So the Authorised Version renders the phrase ; the word rendered " the dungeon " should, however, be rendered " *the hole* : " it is " applied to a prison as a miserable hole, because often dry cesspools were used as prisons."—Keil and Delitzsch's Commentary, *in loco*.

mitted to Joseph's hands all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him" (Joseph), "and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper." So much stress is laid on the favour shewn to Joseph by the governor of the state-prison, that we naturally conceive of his position as one of unusual freedom, with but little in it to quicken resentment or regret.

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage:"

and here at least were no envious brethren to grudge him honour, no licentious mistress to tempt him to sin against God and man. If his mind were quiet and at peace, Joseph might very well be content with his position; the virtual governor of the king's prison had no reason, one should think, to envy the slave in Potiphar's house.

So we should think. But, as we learn from a supplementary scripture, Joseph was by no means of our mind, nor were his circumstances altogether so happy as we have supposed them to be. In Psalm cv., ver. 17—19, we read:—"He sent a man before them: Joseph was sold for a slave. *They tormented his feet with fetters; his soul came into iron*, until the time when his word came; the word of the Lord cleared him." The light shed by these words shines into the dark Egyptian dungeon, and enables us to see the prisoner and his condition more distinctly. Honoured and trusted as he was, he was nevertheless "tormented with fetters." He was a prisoner, although a favoured prisoner, and thought more of his captivity than of the favour which softened its rigours. If his fetters were slender and light, still they were fetters, and no free man will brook the chain. In these earlier Israelites, moreover,

there was the Arab strain of blood and habit ; and, to this day, an Arab dreads bondage more than death. Accustomed to wander, a freeman, about the broad Syrian plains, Joseph found the stifling air of a dungeon hard to breathe. He was a young man, too ; at the very age, therefore, when freedom is most precious, bondage most intolerable. No wonder, then, that his "fetters" were his "torment." He would resent them with the full passion of the youth and the nomad.

And he was bound *in misery* as well as in iron ; he sat in an inner darkness and in the shadow of death, "His *soul* came into the iron," says the Hebrew Psalmist : as we should phrase it, "the iron entered into his soul." Besides all the natural passion of the nomad and the youth, there was the religion of the Hebrew to embitter his captivity. For he had been taught by Jacob that good would come to the good, and evil to the evil ; that prosperity was the sign of the Divine favour, and adversity the "note" of the Divine anger. And he had tried to be good, and to enjoy the Divine blessing—tried very hard. Had he not always kept his father's commandments, and followed things of good report, although his brethren were men of "evil report,"* and sought to lead him into evil ways ? And what had he gained by that ? Simply the murderous jealousy and hatred of his brothers. Had he not in the full flush of youthful passion resisted the allurements and entreaties of the beautiful Egyptian, because he would not sin against God ? And what had he gained by that ? Simply the stigma of having committed the very wickedness it was so hard not to commit, and its doom—the dungeon and the fetter. When the perturbed cup-bearer came to him with a dream, had he not used the strange mystic wisdom which he held to be his choicest gift for his neighbour's comfort ? And what had he gained by that ? Simply that the cup-bearer forgot him and

* Genesis xxxvii. 2.

left him to his fate. Were all women wicked then? and all men ungrateful and unjust? Was there no God after all? or was there, instead of a faithful gracious Father, pure and generous as the heaven in which He dwelt, only an austere and capricious despot, as fickle and unjust as Potiphar or Pharaoh? Those early dreams of his, too, dreams of a happy greatness which had suffused his youthful brain with their splendours of hope—were not these from God? He had taken them as from God: so also had the wise venerable father who had talked with God face to face, and who was skilled in reading the omens of human fate and circumstance. Were they mere lies sent to betray him? Was there no truth, no fidelity, in heaven or on earth? Had his father forgotten him as God seemed to have done? Did God hate him as his brothers hated him? Did the keeper of the prison trust him only because he was useful and saved him trouble? Was he, so young, so ardent, with such capacities for wisdom and rule and enjoyment, to drag out his days in a dungeon, *in that hole*, abandoned of God and man? never again to breathe the free air, never to taste the common delights; and all because he had been fool enough to believe in God and goodness, and to do his duty in scorn of consequence?

Thus, with some such despairing thoughts as these, Joseph sat, bound in misery and iron, for two full years, darkness and the shadow of death gathering round him: "they tormented him with fetters;" "the iron entered into his soul." This, at least, is the conception of his prison-life suggested by the Psalmist—a very different conception from that we should have gathered from the book of Genesis, a different and a truer conception. Through long bitter months he bends sad questioning eyes on a heaven no longer flushed with rosy dawns of hope, but dark with the hues of doubt and despair.

Yet, as we know, the road to the throne lay through "that hole;" and but for the hateful fetters which tormented him, he would never have worn the signet from Pharaoh's hand, nor the golden chain which Pharaoh flung round his neck. From ruling the state-prison, he was called to rule the state. "The word of the Lord cleared him," and all the bright dreams of his youth were outdone. He learned, learned by happy experience, that the great Ruler of men is no austere capricious tyrant, but a most just and gracious Lord; that father Jacob had mourned for him, refusing to be comforted. With his good he overcame the evil that was in his brethren, turning their hatred to love and self-reproach. The night in which he sat ushered in a long and brilliant day. If his fetters tormented him, it was only that he might grow perfect through suffering: *if the iron entered into his soul, it was only that it might make him strong.*

II. Now the prison-experience of Joseph is by no means an exceptional experience. Its value for us lies mainly in the fact, that it helps us to understand the common lot of man. For most of us, although we are not thrust into a dungeon, although we are not compelled to sit bound for years in misery and iron, are nevertheless familiar with the perplexities of thought, and with that brooding half-despairing melancholy the iron of which entered into his soul. It would seem, indeed, to be a law of the Divine government, that in proportion as men are great in capacities for service, they should have their capacities developed by bitter and long-sustained afflictions. "The poets learn in suffering what they teach in song." Great captains, great statesmen, great inventors, great reformers and philanthropists have almost, if not quite, invariably to cut their way to success through hindering thickets or forests of obstruction. All the earlier steps of their course are marked by

their blood. They have to fight as for their life before the world will permit them to serve it. They are shackled by the customs of their time, the prejudices, the established modes of thought and action : and simply because they are before their age and see its real issues and needs with a clearer eye than their neighbours, they have to waste their energies for years against the obstacles which every man is ready to thrust into their path. It is long before they gather the momentum requisite to carry them sheer through the barriers which "the millions—mostly fools," build up before them. Often they can only settle to their real task, and take their true place in the regards of men, when they are weary, and their strength is well-nigh spent. Nor is it otherwise with those who would be sincerely or greatly good. It is almost impossible to recall a teacher or saint of ancient times whose earlier years were not familiar with sorrow and defeat, who was not hampered and obstructed on every side from the very moment in which he set himself to teach a new truth, or to enforce a purer morality. Patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, apostles were all tormented with these fetters, and felt the iron of them in their very souls. Nay, even in our own age, so ready to brag of its superior light and sweetness, we know very well that no man can think for himself and therefore think differently from his neighbours, or shew any originality in goodness, or even so much as attempt to rise above the common and low levels of Christian faith and obedience, than he is instantly beset by manifold obstructions—reviled, thwarted, or forsaken. "Bring out the fetters," is the common cry even in the Church ; "clap him into prison. He is going too fast." Even if there be no formal active opposition, he has to conquer the inertia, the indifference, the ready suspicion of his neighbours, before they will let him teach them what it has cost him much to learn, before they will believe that earnest and devout study

has taught him more than they know. And while this conflict is going on, he will often mistrust himself, often despair of men; sometimes he will even doubt the truth of truth and the goodness of God. Like Joseph, he may indeed carry a brave composed countenance, and go about in his prison with wisdom and discretion, rendering what service its hard conditions will permit; but none the less his fetters torment him, their iron enters into his soul.

More or less this is the experience of all good men; and the mystery, the apparent injustice, of it often tortures and afflicts them far more than the mere suffering it involves.

How shall we explain the mystery? What comfort can we give them? Shall we say?—"Your lot is for the present very hard; but you will have your compensations by-and-by. The world or the Church will listen to you, or, if they do not, God will. Your fetters will fall off, the dark prison-gates will roll open, and you will go forth to enjoy a success all the sweeter for the bondage in which you now mourn." Shall we say that? If we have only that to say, we shall be miserable comforters. There may be, indeed there is, a certain comfort in such a hopeful prophecy. But the comfort does not go very deep; for it does not remove the apparent *injustice* of the case; and till that be done, we only lay our hands on the hole of the asp, instead of plucking out its venom. The mere fact that Joseph was afterwards raised to the throne of Egypt did not justify the wrong previously done him, if it was a wrong. No subsequent happiness could bring back the two bright years of youth which he had lost in the darkness of the dungeon, nor even compensate him for them. And the good men to whom we take our comfortable prophecy of future success, might reply to us with some natural resentment: "We are not children that we should take an undeserved whipping, and, because we are afterwards comforted with

kisses and sugar-plums, pronounce the injustice just. Whatever success we may have by-and-by, that will not restore these wasted years, nor explain why we are suffered to waste them and to sit shrouded in the darkness of defeat, and neglect, and misery."

And there would be reason in their resentment. For good men, men really bent on doing good and being good, care most of all to possess and do the good at which they aim. To be useful is more to them than to be successful in the personal sense, or to be happy. Their first want is to be able to think of God as just and true in his ways, not to have sumptuous fare, and gay apparel, and easy pleasant times. Before we can give them the true comfort, we must see and be able to say, that the years spent in unsuccessful toils are *not* wasted years; that the defeats, and neglects, and sorrows which they mourn over are sent to them in justice and in love.

Now this is the very comfort suggested by our new conception of Joseph's prison-life. Rightly viewed, that mournful phrase, "the iron entered into his soul," is a most hopeful and animating phrase. For if, on the one hand, it sets forth the misery and despair of the captive; on the other hand, it sets forth the inward strength bred of that despair and misery. It is a good thing to *have* iron in the soul, although to *get* it there involves so great a pain. Iron in the soul is as requisite as iron in the blood, as indispensable to spiritual strength as to physical health, if by "iron" we understand, as we may, the manly hardness which can endure the blows of adverse circumstance, the shocks of change. Joseph's two full years in that hole of a dungeon were by no means wasted years. The natural force of his character, as we can faintly discern in the Sacred Chronicle, had been emasculated and warped by the unwise petting of the father who doated on him. As

he loiters about in his coat of state, exempted from the toils exacted of his brethren, we can detect a certain strut in his gait. He is innocent and pure ; but he is vain, and a little childish for a lad of his years. He tells tales of his brothers. He recounts his dreams of greatness with a simplicity, a quiet faith in his superiority over them, which could hardly fail to incense them. He makes no allowance for temptations the full force of which he has not felt. He shows no sign of manliness, no capacity for sway, no competence to handle men and rule events. But a few years in slavery and prison make a surprising difference in him. All his softness, and vanity, and over-simplicity—all his talkativeness, and assumption, and incompetence are clean taken out of him. From the moment he leaves the prison, he carries himself with a discretion, a modesty, a manly wisdom and resolution which never fail him. He moves before us a born ruler of men, with forward-looking eyes, with a swift yet composed activity, with the tact of a courtier and the generosity of a prince. He is a Hebrew and a shepherd ; he is therefore of a vocation and a strain most obnoxious to the Egyptians, since their great public danger was the raids of the wandering Arab shepherds—Abraham's children, Joseph's cousins—who frequented the Arabian border. He had to carry the country through seven successive years of famine, during which he bought up all the small proprietors of the land, and converted Egypt into a royal patrimony. In short, he carried the State through the most radical revolutionary changes. And yet he, who a few years since was so inept that he could not conciliate the love of his own kinsmen, is well-nigh adored by the alien race which had so many plausible reasons for hating him : throughout the long period of his rule we hear of no single movement of revolt, nor even of a single murmur against his authority. Not in vain has

the iron entered into his soul. He has suffered, and is strong.

Now there is true comfort in that, for it plucks the sting of injustice from the sorrows of the good. If we must suffer, if we must submit to many hindrances, overget much opposition, see many years pass before we can teach the truth or do the work on which we have set our hearts; if, before we find our lives bathed in the light of the Divine favour, we must sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; if, before we can walk in the freedom of a perfected obedience, we must be long bound in misery and iron, we shall be content if only we know that the iron is thrust into our souls to make us strong. We can be patient and hopeful when once we are assured that all our defeats and disappointments, our failures and reverses and broken illusions, are parts of the discipline by which God is training us for the work we long to do, and are qualifying us to enjoy the freedom we crave. If only our character is being moulded and hardened, and its capacities brought out by suffering, then it is not unjust of God to inflict suffering upon us. It is not unjust, although we have not deserved the suffering, nor can ever deserve it: it is most tender and gracious, since He who is afflicted in all our afflictions will be very sure not to lay upon us more than we are able to bear, and is thus preparing us to be and do all that we most desire to do and be. If we can become perfect only through suffering, shall we not thank Him for the suffering which perfects us? If only as we learn to rule in the prison of deferred opportunities and defeated hopes, we can become fit to rule over the "many cities" of the heavenly kingdom, shall we shrink from the prison which leads to the throne? If the iron *must* enter our souls that we may be strong amid the flatteries and the adversities of fortune, shall even the fetters which torment us be unwelcome to us?

Do any say, "Ah, but the day is long in coming; sometimes, so far as we can see, it never comes; the darkness never quite clears off, the fetters never fall. If some men suffer and are strong, others suffer and are weak. What comfort is there for these?" There is this comfort—that the discipline begun here is often completed hereafter. Our lives are so long, if we did but know it, and we have so much to learn, that the whole earthly lot of some—and these often the most capable and heroic souls—is a mere captivity as compared with what it will be, a mere training for a task beyond their present reach. Till we can see them no longer, they sit in darkness, bound in misery and iron. The rust of their fetters is never washed out of their souls until they reach that stream of living waters which men name Death. What then? If God has been so long in fitting them to his hand, in attempering them to his purpose, we may be very sure that He will not cast them away and his pains on them; but that He is reserving them for some lofty work, some high perilous enterprise, whose trials and perils only select souls can affront. If we see the iron entering into their souls, do we not also see that He is trying and purging them, bringing them to a more heavenly temper and a finer edge? How, then, can we doubt that He will yet use them in his great conflict with evil, and give them a place of honour in it? How can we doubt that the longer He delays to use them the more heroic is the strife to which they are devoted, the more glorious the honour for which they are reserved?

If the world wants iron dukes and iron men, God wants iron saints, and therefore He suffers the iron to enter their souls.

V.

Divine Ordinances of Labour.

EXODUS XVIII. 13—26.

JETHRO, the father-in-law of Moses, is one of the most striking figures reflected in the glass of the Word. He is described in general terms as the priest and prince of Midian—combines in himself, therefore, both sacerdotal and royal functions. More particularly, he is the sheikh or chief of the Kenites, a clan of the vast tribe of Midian, dwelling on the shores of the Gulf of Akaba. He is the very type of the Arab chief, such as he remains to the present day. His numerous flocks feed round the well of Midian, tended by the seven daughters for whom, when the rough shepherds would have driven them from the well, Moses stood up. He is very grateful to “the Egyptian” who “delivered his daughters out of the hand of the shepherds, and drew water, and watered their flocks.” He treats him with the princely hospitality and courtesy which are still to be found in the Arabian tents, and gives him one of the seven daughters to wife.*

When the children of Israel, in their flight from Egypt, encamped on “the Mount of God,”† the old chief, attracted from far by the tidings of his kinsman’s fame, presents himself before the “Man of God”:—“I, Jethro, thy father-in-law, am come unto thee, and thy wife, and thy two sons

* Exodus xi. 15—22.

† Exodus xviii. 1. *et seq.*

with her. And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him"—gave the full Arab salutation on each side of the face; "and they asked each other of their welfare," greeting each other with that rapid and vociferous outburst of question and answer which still characterizes the meeting of Arabs, but which soon lapses into silence as hand in hand "they come into the tent" to confer privately of what each really wishes to know.*

Jethro listens to "all that the Lord had done unto the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them." He "rejoices in the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel," and with his own priestly sanctity acknowledges the greatness of Jehovah, his kinsman's God. He offers sacrifices unto Jehovah as "greater than all gods," even the gods which he himself had worshipped; and "Aaron," the future high priest, "and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with Jethro,"—to join, that is, in the solemn feast of thanksgiving which succeeded to and prolonged this act of worship.

Jethro is the first friend whom Moses has met, the first councillor since he cut himself off from the wisdom of Egypt: he is very loth to part with him. He pleads and entreats—"Come thou with us, and we will do thee good."† At first Jethro refuses to give up the wild freedom of his nomadic life—"I will not go." But knowing that Jethro with his Bedouin instincts and knowledge of the wilderness would be an invaluable guide, Moses renews his entreaties—"Leave us not, I pray thee; *for thou knowest how we should encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.* And if thou wilt go with us, what goodness

* Dean Stanley's "Jewish Church," pp. 141—3.

† Numbers x. 29—32.

the Lord will do to us the same will we do to thee." At last Moses prevails ; for though " Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away into his own land," * he must afterwards have returned, bringing many of his tribe with him. All through the subsequent history of Israel, even in its most settled and civilized ages, we come on the traces of the Kenites, living their free desert life, dwelling in tents, and drinking no wine ; one with the people of the Jews, and yet retaining their Arab customs ; producing men distinguished in the worst times by their fidelity to God and to the habits of their fathers,—as, for instance, Jabez, who was " more honourable than his brethren ;" Jonadab, the austere sectary, who rode with Jehu when that vehement prince sought to extirpate every worshipper of Baal throughout the land ; and that little band of Rechabites, who, in the final siege of Jerusalem, pitched their tents in the streets, and rather than drink wine endured the parching thirsts of famine.†

During his visit to Moses, " on the morrow " after his arrival, Jethro saw with infinite concern that Moses sat all day long listening to the complaints of the whole camp, wearing himself out in efforts to do justice, wearing the people out by keeping many of them standing before him from morning to evening, and then sending some of them away with their suits unheard. He remonstrates with the exhausted Judge—" The thing thou doest is not good ; thou wilt surely wear away, both thou and this people." He suggests that inferior judges should be appointed in every tribe—" men of truth who fear God"—to rule over tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands, with power to decide all " small matters," and to refer " the hard causes " to Moses : in short, Jethro suggests that subordination of rulers and judges, of elders or sheikhs, with which he was familiar in the tents of Midian, and which

* Exodus xviii. 27.

† Jeremiah xxxv.

may be found among the Arab tents in full operation to this very day.

How valuable is a little common sense—and how scarce! Here was Moses, a man trained in kings' palaces, deeply skilled in all the wisdom of Egypt, and yet he has to wait till Jethro comes—a mere man of the desert, before to a self-evident evil he can apply a self-evident remedy. He is wearing out his own strength in vain efforts to do justice among the thousands of Israel, and yet it never strikes him that he need not listen to all their petty squabbles, but may very safely commit the decision of them to inferior men.

“The thing thou doest is not good:” but is it not good to administer justice, even though it be administered to ignorant fugitive slaves and have to handle all their base and sordid quarrels? Yes: it was the duty of Moses to administer justice; it was the duty of the people to ask for justice instead of coming to blows: and duty is always good, even though it be irksome. The error lay in the mode of discharging the duty. It might be discharged more efficiently, and without exhausting the energies either of the people or of the judge. It was a lawful, a laudable work, pushed to a perilous extreme; and it was not the work itself but the undue extreme to which it was pushed that was not good. Labour is good; but if we labour unwisely, so as to overtask and enervate our faculties, the labour which in itself is good becomes, through our perversity, an evil.

Labour, the Division of Labour, and the Intermission of Labour, are all Divine Ordinances, and only as we accept all three do we get the full good of all our labours under the sun.

I.—*Labour is an Ordinance of God.* Moses, even though he act on Jethro's suggestion, is not to cease from the task

of administering justice. On the contrary, justice, by his wiser action, is to be more perfectly and efficiently administered. Moses is to select true and "able men," "such as fear God and hate covetousness," to be rulers of thousands, and hundreds, and fifties, and tens. The "great matters" and the "hard causes" are still to be brought to him. He will have plenty to do in deciding the more difficult and complicated cases, and in selecting men competent to rule and judge—plenty to do, but no longer too much.

And in like manner with us: whatever merciful alleviations and remissions of toil the good providence of God may have brought, there is plenty of work for every man to do—work which he cannot neglect save to his own hurt, and to the loss of the community at large. No man is so unhappy or so likely to become a burden to himself and a pest to his neighbours as he who neither has a daily task set him, nor sets himself a task. Labour braces the energies of mind and body, and makes the after-rest sweet. It conditions all good things; for all good things are hard to get; and in the labour of getting them lies our best safeguard against temptations to evil.

God is very bountiful; and doubtless the united labours of every man in England produce enough for each and all, enough to secure the common weal and to give every man as many good things—as much education, as much influence, as much property, as much leisure—as he could wisely use. But while some stand idle all the day long, while the products of the national labour are so unequally distributed as that the few have more than they can use for good and the many have not enough to keep the spectres of Want and Ignorance at bay, even the busiest man may well feel called to add to his labours the study of political science or whatever other wisdom will teach us how all may be compelled to work and the fair distribution be attained. No able man

can withdraw his labours from the public stock without doing a public wrong. For though labour be not a curse, yet, through the sin of man, a curse has fallen on labour. The earth, once prolific of good and nourishing growths, has been smitten into comparative sterility, or is fertile in noxious and obstructive growths. Thorns and thistles spring up where we might have found wheat or vines, healing herbs or luscious fruits. The earth may still be coaxed and compelled into yielding all that men require ; but to get this yield demands much labour at the hands of man—a labour in which all must unite. 'Tis an universal, and therefore, we may be sure, a merciful ordinance—"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread ;" and if any man's brow be dry, it is because others are sweating beyond their strength. There is work for all, and need for every man's work, of whatever sort it may be—from thinking the thoughts or pursuing the scientific discoveries which clear the road along which the world is to advance, down to working a loom or digging a field ; from managing a large estate so as to develop all its manifold capabilities of service, down to trimming its hedges or hauling its coal.

If, moreover, a curse has been pronounced on labour, making it hard, a blessing has been pronounced upon it and put into it. The Lord Jesus wrought with his hands in the just Carpenter's shop. He and those whom He inspired have taught us that we may do all we do, labour at the basest and meanest toils, to the glory of God ; that we may find a sacramental efficacy in our labours, and through our labours render a sacramental service.

So that if, on the one hand, the curse pronounced on labour urges, on the other hand the blessing pronounced on labour invites, us all to take our part in the work of the world. If we do not do whatsoever our hand findeth to do, and do it with our might, our neighbours suffer for it, and

we miss a benediction we might have had. Till all men are wise, and good, and well-provided, we dare not fold our hand in our bosom ; or because *we* fare comfortably, if not sumptuously, ask, while Lazarus lies perishing at our very gate—" And, pray, who is my neighbour ? "

II.—*The Division of Labour is an Ordinance of God.* Moses will surely wear away if he do everything for himself, and " by himself alone." Let him therefore hearken to the practical wisdom of Jethro, and, dividing the work among many, that which is " too heavy " for him will become light to them. *Divide the labour, and conquer the difficulty.*

There is parable here as well as history. For at first man, like Moses, attempted to " perform " everything " by himself alone." Every family had to make its own tents, feed its own sheep, grow its own corn, cut out its own garments. No scripture of Heavenly Wisdom taught them the simple secret of Civilization—to unite in common labour, and to apportion the several parts of the common labour to the most skilful and competent hands. They were taught this secret by the Providence which speaks through human experience. Nor was it long before they learned that if one man by giving himself wholly to the labours of agriculture could grow food enough for fifty men, the other forty-nine would be set free from planting and tending each his little plot of ground, and might give themselves this man to one handicraft, and that to another—Jabal to keeping flocks, and Jubal to making musical instruments, and Tubal-Cain to working in metals ; and that, by thus dividing their labour and combining to partake its products, the conveniences and comforts of their life might be indefinitely increased.

And this secret God has been teaching through the ages. He has stored the earth with all the treasure

necessary to the welfare of mankind, and planted in man all the faculties and energies necessary to the discovery and appropriation of these treasures, and then left him to discover and appropriate them. Many of these treasures are closely hidden—coal and iron, for instance ; yet men have been left to detect them, to discover their properties and uses by successive experiments, and the best modes of turning them to account. Discovery, prompted by need, has kept pace with need. Every century, every decade, and of late almost every year, has brought the knowledge of some new force of nature, or some novel application of an old force, which has multiplied the provision for men's wants in exact proportion as men and their wants have multiplied. Mechanism, inspired by Steam, now does the work of many millions of men, and work which no conceivable number of men, unaided by mechanism, could possibly have achieved ; yet man's labour has not grown less, but rather more. What would have become of the world if steam had not been discovered, or if iron still lay hidden in the depths of the earth ?

And these discoveries of new forces, or new applications of force, would obviously have been impossible had every man continued to wear himself out in vain efforts to make his own clothes, and grow his own wheat, to keep his own sheep, and hunt his own game. It is the wise division and distribution of labour to which we owe all the services and comforts of civilized life ; and the wiser the distribution, the higher the civilization. It is this division of labour which multiplies the products of labour, and not only sets men free to invent improved methods of labour, but also puts them in the way of inventing them. If, for instance, one man could make a tent in ten days, ten men, each of whom was trained to make his separate part, would turn out not ten, but fifty or a hundred, tents in the same time : and

each of the ten, always handling the same tools and working on the same substance—canvass, or wood for poles and pegs, or palm fibre or hemp for ropes—would naturally improve his tools to save his pains, and discover qualities and capabilities in the substance which only long familiarity could detect. From such simple beginnings as these has risen that division of the whole civilized community into separate trades and professions, and these trades and professions again into many component elements and specialities, which multiplies its productive power to an almost infinite extent, and keeps the discovery of our means and appliances of labour up to the level of our growing numbers and wants. Compare the value of the labour of a thousand Englishmen or Frenchmen with that of a thousand Arabs or Indians, and you will gain some conception of what the world owes to God's ordinance for the division of labour—what it owes of safety, convenience, comfort, education, peace.

III.—*The Intermission of Labour is an Ordinance of God.* Man is not a machine that he should do nothing but work, though he often uses himself as if he were. If he give himself to incessant labour, or if, like Moses, he simply carry labour to an excess, he will surely wear himself away and yet not achieve that at which he aims ; while if he will listen to some wise Jethro, and lighten his labour, he may long retain his strength, and in the long run do a larger stroke of work than if he went at it with the feverish excitement which preys upon the strength it evokes. To wear out is better than to rust out ; but it is best of all neither to rust out in sloth nor prematurely to wear out in undue toils. There have been races and generations to whom the appropriate message was, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways, and be wise : " but the message which *we* need to

hear is rather, "The thing thou doest is not good; thou wilt surely wear thyself away." Not but what labour is good, but that the labour which, not content with using the interest of our daily strength, draws upon and exhausts the capital of constitutional health, makes that which is good in itself an evil to us. And in this generation, competition has grown so keen, and large capitalists can nurse up such enormous fortunes out of the smallest profits, and the whole world is so bound together by commercial ties which make the disasters of distant lands near and heavy oppressions, that not a few among us tread a narrow causeway between dishonesty on the one hand and insanity on the other, and are in perpetual imminent danger of missing their footing. They are so absorbed by the cares and anxieties of business that not unfrequently they altogether lose that fresh innocent enjoyment of their life which they ought to have, and fail to raise their eyes to anything higher than price-lists, and share-quotations, and market-returns.

Now this obviously is not good. It is to buy the means of living at the cost of life itself and all that makes it worth having. To follow any vocation with so absorbing an interest as to undermine health and to neglect the higher ends for which life is given, is both unwise and wicked. It is to sin against the law which God has written on our bodies—a law which is very prompt to avenge itself, and against the law which He has revealed in our reason and experience. Better surely is a crust and enjoyment therewith than sumptuous fare and no appetite for it. "Plain living and high thinking" compose a happier lot than high living and the low thoughts that can only creep about the earth, and never wish to creep beyond the narrow pale of traffic. If the purchase money be your better life, even though you should get the whole world in exchange, you have made but a poor bargain of it with all your skill of business.

And, therefore, lest our hearts should be unduly set on labour and its prizes, God has ordained the intermission of labour. Not only has He given us an inward monitor which warns us when mental or vital powers are overtaken, to seek out holiday mirth and recreative sports, to change the air we breathe and the scenes on which we look if perchance we may thus change the wearing current of our thoughts; He has also fixed bounds to our labour beyond which we cannot or ought not to pass. Seven times a week the day draws to an end, and the night comes on in which most of us at least are compelled to rest. The curtains of darkness are drawn, and gracious restorative sleep—"sleep which," as Sancho Panza so graphically expressed it, "covers a man all over like a cloak"—hushes the busy fret and worry of the spirit, carrying us into a balmy vacancy, or a strange yet pleasant dream-land, and sending us back to our work, with the morning light, fresh as the morning air. Once every week, too, there returns the Day of Rest, on which we cease from our toils, and withdraw our minds from the noisy labours and corroding anxieties of traffic. Ah! if men would obey this divine ordinance, if they would abstract their *minds* as well as their hands from labour night by night as they return to the home, and Sunday by Sunday as they come up to the House of God, instead of wearing themselves away, they would carry an intenser vigour to their toils, and do more though in lesser time. It is because they will not rest when God says, "Rest," nor worship when God says, "Worship," that so many are urged into mania, or borne to a premature grave.

For this Holy Day is not simply a day of rest from business toils; it is also a day of worship, and thus its sanitary and restorative character is indefinitely enhanced. It is the strain of one unvarying round of thought which saps our mental and vital forces; and to have our thoughts lifted at regular

and frequent intervals into a higher and calmer region than that in which they more commonly move, is health to them and invigoration ; the mind, raised out of and above its customary cares, recovers tone, and elasticity, and strength. Viewed simply as a divine provision for "the relief of man's estate," the worship of the Sanctuary is beyond all price ; and when this worship extends through the whole week, and finds expression even in the labours of our calling,—when we can do even *these* to the glory of God, and no longer fret about the issue of our labours because we believe that *He* knows all our needs and will supply them, then we have reached that impregnable shelter and fortress in which whosoever abides, though he be still assailed, can never be overcome by the cares of life ; then, "dwelling in the shadow of the Almighty," we rest with child-like confidence in his promise both for the life that now is, and for that which is to come.

Hence it is that when we *are* over eager in our labours for present good, or what we think a good, God so often sends some rugged Jethro—some warning sickness or calamitous loss, some sorrow that, passing through all our defences, smites and cleaves our very heart. Not because He grudges our prosperity, or would abate our happiness, but because He would have us rise to that sacred rest and satisfying peace which even adversity cannot take away, He often sends a chastening whose message, if we will hear it, is, "The thing thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear thyself away, and wastefully expend thy life on things which perish as you handle them. Turn ye at my reproof ; for why should ye die?"

VI.

King Bramble.

JUDGES IX. 8—15.

“**B**EHOLD the fig-tree and all the trees. When they shoot forth, ye see, and know of your own selves, that summer is nigh at hand.” Now, if we set ourselves to “learn the parable of the fig-tree and all the trees,” what have they to teach us? That summer is nigh at hand? Yes, that, and much more than that; they have so much to teach us, indeed, that it would not be hard to learn a new parable of them every day the whole year through. The Lord Jesus has interpreted many of their utterances for us. So also have the ancient Hebrew writers who were before Him. Most of the more antique Hebrew parables, indeed, are taken from the vegetable kingdom. In the Hebrew literature the vine, the cedar, the thorn, the thistle take the place which in the fables of India and Greece is occupied by talking beasts and birds and fishes. And of all these parables or fables, the parable of Jotham has the first claim on our thoughts; and that for at least two reasons. First, for the manner of its telling: no other fable was ever told, I think, under circumstances and in a way so striking and impressive. Second, for its antiquity: in all probability it is the most ancient of fables, as Lamech’s is the most ancient of songs.

To learn this parable we must transport ourselves in thought back, through more than thirty centuries, to the time of the Judges. Then the children of Israel had but newly entered on the land of promise. They had not yet fully subdued and possessed themselves of it. The land was still infested by remnants of the fierce heathen races they were sent to supplant. There was no king in Israel, no national organization or unity. Tribes and families dwelt apart. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes," and what was right in his eyes was often wrong in God's. They were hemmed in, on the one hand, by organized kingdoms, by proud warrior races possessed of the arts of an ancient civilization ; and, on the other hand, by the uncivilized nomadic races who had opposed their entrance into the land. Both were bitterly hostile to the Hebrew people and the Hebrew faith ; both impoverished the land by perpetual forays, and often, for years together, incorporated broad tracts of it with their dominions.

To meet and check these alien foes God raised up chieftains or judges, usually from the tribe imperilled at the moment, and inspired them with a valour before which the invaders trembled and fled. Of these judges Gideon was the greatest. To the valour which was their common attribute, he added a singular sweetness and nobility of nature ; insomuch that, when he had driven out the invading Midianites, the men of Israel came to him with the prayer, "Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son." It was the first attempt to institute an hereditary monarchy, and though Gideon rejected the title of king, he henceforth ruled in royal state. With the royal state, he adopted the royal license of the time, taking to himself many wives and concubines. By his wives he had threescore and ten sons, of whom Jotham, the speaker of our parable, was the youngest. Among his concubines was a woman of

Shechem, the ancient capital of Israel, in which city, as in some others, the heathen inhabitants of the land were suffered to dwell side by side with the Israelites. By this heathen slave, the daughter of a subject race, Gideon had a son, named Abimelech, who inherited the daring of his father, without his goodness and sweetness of nature. On the death of Gideon, the bastard Abimelech resolved to take his father's place. He hurried to Shechem, collected the members of his mother's family and race, and appealed to their feeling of clan and kinship: "Remember," he said, "I am of your bone and flesh, while the other sons of Gideon are of the Hebrew blood, and will treat you as aliens and slaves." They responded to the appeal: "He is our brother," they said, "we can make better terms with him." They helped him with money from the public treasury. With this money he hired men; he marched with them to Ophrah where his seventy half-brothers held their court, surprised them, slew them all on one stone—save Jotham, who escaped—and returned in triumph to Shechem. The men of his mother's tribe went out to meet him; and, as he stood beneath the venerable and mighty oak from beneath which Joshua had addressed the nation, they saluted him, the first in sacred history, with the name of *King*.

A feast was held to celebrate his elevation to the royal dignity. And at the feast, while they pledged the king beneath the sacred oak, there occurred a singular and ominous interruption to their mirth. A voice was heard high in the air, and looking up, they see Jotham, the one son of Gideon who had escaped the slaughter, standing on a spur of Mount Gerizim that projects over the valley in which they were gathered. He stands on the conspicuous cliff, inaccessible from below, which still towers over the very spot,—vast caverns opening immediately behind him into

which he can plunge long before they from below can climb round to the dizzy pinnacle on which he rests ; and from which, as recent experiments have proved, his voice would be audible through the valley. Straight, but far, beneath him are the revellers at the royal feast. Around them spreads the unparalleled mass of verdure in which, alone of all the cities of Palestine, Shechem is embosomed to this day the whole valley being covered with the cedar, the oak, the olive, the fig, the vine, and the thorny fragrant underwood.

Jotham is there to denounce the cruel worthless bastard who has destroyed his father's house, and to rebuke the men of Shechem with their crime in electing him their king. The wooded scene before him gives form to his thoughts. He cries, "Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you." With this brief adjuration he plunges at once into his parable, a parable in which, grave as the occasion was, we can still detect some touches of his father's quaint bright humour. In effect his parable runs thus :

Once upon a time the trees went forth to do what you are doing now, to anoint a king. And, first, they went to the Olive, and said, "Reign thou over us." But the Olive replied, "My veins run oil : shall I leave my fatness to run up and down for the other trees? Not I." Then they went to the Fig, and said, "Reign *thou* over us then." But the Fig-tree replied, "My veins run honey : shall I leave my sweetness to run up and down for the other trees? Not I." Then they went to the Vine, and said, "Come *thou*, then, and reign over us." But the Vine replied, "My veins run wine : shall I leave my good cheer to run up and down for the other trees? Not I." Out of heart with many rebuffs, they came, last of all, to the Bramble, and said, "O Brambel, wilt *thou* reign over us?" "That will I," said the Bramble, "with all my thorns. There is no wine, no honey, no oil

in my veins. I will cheerfully run up and down for the other trees. But I pray you do not mock me. If I am indeed to be your king, come all of you, oak and cedar, olive, and vine, and fig-tree, and put your trust in my shadow. If not, and you fail in the reverence you owe me, I pray heaven that I may catch fire, and set you all on fire, till even the tall big cedars there are consumed." Thus spoke the Bramble, being naturally of a hot fiery temperament; and the trees were caught in their own trap; and the loftiest of them had to do homage to the lowest, and the noblest to the most base. And even so King Bramble was not appeased; but when he had had his will of the trees, "to serve his private ends," he did catch fire, set them on fire, and the whole forest was consumed.

This, in substance and spirit, was the parable of Jotham; and no scholar reading it in the Hebrew can fail to be struck with the quaint humour which pervades it, or to be surprised at meeting with these humorous touches on an occasion so grave and tragic. Jotham's intention in the parable is not hard to trace. His father Gideon, some phase of whose character is set forth in each of the nobler trees, such as the vine, the fig, the olive, and the cedar—the venerated judge, whose sweet temper broke forth in a humour as bright and cheerful as wine, was the hero first chosen by the men of Shechem and the men of Israel to be their king. He had shewn himself too wise, too good, too gracious to assume the royal title and to lord it over his brethren. And now, forgetting Gideon's "goodness," they had chosen base Abimelech, mean and worthless as the bramble, and full of cruel thorns, to be their king, although his hands were red with the blood of Gideon's sons. He would prove a true bramble-king to them; out of him there would go forth a fire which would fly from hill to hill, till even distant Lebanon kindled into flame.

The prediction was fulfilled. Within three years the men of Shechem, who now cried of Abimelech, "He is our brother, and shall be our king," remembered that he was the son of Gidéon the Hebrew. They revolted against his tyranny. The insurrection was quenched in their blood. Shechem was utterly destroyed. Again the rebels, defeated and scattered, drew to a head in the wide corn-fields at the end of the valley; and again they were overthrown with great slaughter. The survivors betook themselves to the lofty tower, the stronghold of the Temple of their League. Abimelech advanced against them over the mountains and through the forests of Zalmon. He cut down a bough, and bade his men also provide themselves with boughs. They piled up the branches round the stronghold, kindled them, and the tower with its inmates was consumed. At Thebez he attempted to repeat the same ruse. He advanced to fire the vast heap of boughs and underwood; as he applied the torch he was felled to the earth by "a piece of a millstone," flung by a woman's hand, and bade his armour-bearer thrust him through, that it might not be said, "*A woman slew him!*" *Thus* fire broke forth from the Bramble-King to devour the men of Shechem; and fire broke forth from the men of Shechem to devour the king. "Thus God recompensed the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren."

It is the wild story of a wild time. Nevertheless, it has lessons for us; but the moral commonly drawn from it is surely one of the few lessons it does not teach. The common moral is, that monarchy is alien to the will of God; that here from the first He condemns the monarchical form of government. "See," cries Democracy, "in the earliest recorded parable we are taught that kings are mere brambles, full of thorns of offence, and that those who submit to them are consumed in the fire which they kindle." This political con

clusion has been drawn, indeed, from the whole scope and tenor of the Hebrew history, from Jehovah's reluctance to give his people a king, and from the terrible calamities which came upon them so soon as the monarchical form of government was established among them.

Both these arguments are singularly illogical, and may be turned in a moment against those who use them. Jotham's parable, even if we *are* to take this Hebrew lad as a grave political authority, condemns only one base criminal who chanced to be called a king: it would have been just as pertinent had he been called a judge instead of a king. The parable implies that if the Olive, or the Fig, or the Vine, had been elected to the regal function and had accepted it, all would have gone well with the forest: it is only the election of the base ungracious Bramble which is condemned. In short, the parable denounces not kings, but bad kings.

So, again, it is very true that Jehovah was reluctant to give the Jews a king. But why? Simply because *He* claimed to be their King, and the best king they could have. And if it be easy to infer an argument against monarchy from his reluctance to grant them another king than Himself, it is equally easy to infer an argument for monarchy from the fact that He Himself was and is a king.

The true political lesson of Jotham's parable is surely this: that the highest places in the State should be given only to the best men; that the bramble should never be permitted to usurp the place of the olive or the vine, and that the vine and the olive should not shrink from the duties which their very sweetness and fatness impose upon them. When men of noble character, and great parts, and refined culture withdraw from public life—as, for instance, we are told they do in America—and leave the administration of public affairs to the ignorant and greedy and unscrupulous; or when, as often happens in England, men who are worth-

less as brambles, simply because they have a long purse or a long pedigree (and brambles are at least as old as the Curse), are thrust into seats of honour and responsibility—then we may predict, with Jotham, that a fire will break forth from them in which much that we love will be consumed. If Gideon will not rule, and Abimelech will; or if we are base enough to prefer a base Abimelech before a noble Gideon, we may be very sure that evil will come of it, and not good: we shall not gather grapes off briars, nor figs off thistles: we may confidently look for thorns and flames in lieu of wine and honey.

This, I apprehend, is the true political moral of the parable. It is a most religious moral; for it teaches us in what spirit our political duties should be discharged, that they should be discharged in the fear of God; it warns us that so often as we help to put a bad man into a good place, we so far forth conspire against the best interests of our country, and are traitors to the common weal.

But it is not this moral which chiefly commends Jotham's parable to our thoughts. It contains a lesson still more pertinent to the time: it warns us against one of the most special and pressing dangers of the Church. There is, perhaps, no danger more threatening to the efficiency and peace of the Christian Church in these realms than the growing tendency of men of culture and refinement to decline from its communion and service. The best men, those most fitted to guide and instruct the Church, are too often either outside its pale, or, if within it, are content to seek their own growth in knowledge or grace rather than to teach in the pulpit and the school, or to visit the poor and sick, or to conduct any of the enterprises by which the Church seeks to save and serve the world. They try, they tell us, to be good and to do good, to live out the Christian law in their homes and in their business; some of them try

also to hold communion with the wise of past ages, to grow by study, and thought, and prayer, into more perfect men; but they do not care, they think it no part of their duty, to expose themselves to collision with ignorant and vulgar minds, to busy themselves in the toils of active service, to quit the seclusion of the home and the study for the laborious repetitions of school and church work. All *that*, they hold, would be for them a waste of time which they can occupy to better purpose. In brief, it is with us as in the days of Jotham: the Olive says, "My veins run oil; shall I leave my fatness to run up and down for the other trees?" And the Fig says, "My veins run honey; shall I leave my sweetness to run up and down for the other trees?" And the Vine says, "My veins run wine; shall I leave my good cheer to run up and down for the other trees, and, above all, for these miserable brambles who will turn upon me with all their thorns?"

Now we must admit that it is the peculiar and strong temptation of the wise and happy, of men of culture and refinement, to pursue their own clear lofty aims, and leave the world around them to take its own way. All who have stood on the Mount of Vision and Contemplation are disposed to abide there, and to leave the publicans and harlots and demoniacs below to get on as best they can. And therefore we need not be surprised to find that men refined by culture addict themselves to study, and shrink from vulgar and monotonous toils. If *we* were Olives, perhaps we should think more of our own "fatness," especially if we could plead that by this we "honoured God and man," than of running up and down to serve the other trees. So also if we were Fig-trees, and could allege not only our own "sweetness," but also our "good fruit," or if we were Vines, and could plead "the wine which cheereth God and man," we might easily persuade ourselves that it was our duty to

neglect our duty to the other trees, and to go on hoarding up the fatness or the sweetness or the brightness which was not without its use. It would be easy to do that, only too easy.

But "every tree for itself, and the forest will do very well," means, when translated into the higher region, "Every man for himself, and let the Church get on as it can." *Can* the Church get on on these terms? Nay, God has not appointed us to live single and disunited lives, but a common life. We are a fellowship, a communion; each needs help, and should give help. Those who on plea of refinement and self-culture excuse themselves from active participation in the common work of the Church, injure the Christian community in many ways. First of all, they leave the Church to be governed and represented before the world by men of less wisdom than themselves, often by vulgar and ignorant men, who hinder even when they mean to help. Then, too, the Church within itself is not so well taught and ruled, nor so full of grace and peace, as it might be, were those who are most competent to help to yield their help: brambles often kindle fires where olives would yield oil and vines give wine. Moreover, they sin against the divine law which binds gifts to service, which commands us to use for the common good whatever talents we have received. And, last of all, they miss their own special aim, they mar even their own self-culture; for all God's gifts thrive with us and make increase to themselves in proportion as we are faithful stewards of them and use them for the general good. Here, indeed, our figure fails us; for in the natural world the Olive would not grow richer in oil, nor the Fig in honey, nor the Vine in wine, were it to shift from place to place, and go up and down to serve the other trees. But in the spiritual world no Olive, no Fig, no Vine comes to its full perfection, or yields its best fruit, *save* by going up and down for others,

save by serving and helping them. In the spiritual kingdom the Olive that thinks only of its own fatness, the Fig that thinks only of its own sweetness, the Vine that thinks only of its own bright exhilaration, is terribly apt to degrade into a mere briar, full of rending thorns, and quick to kindle into flame.

It would be a strange and quaint spectacle were we to see all the trees of a great forest stumping up and down on their broad gouty roots to inquire after and forward each other's welfare. But there is a spectacle far stranger than this, although it be so common: it is that of a Christian Church whose members do *not* go up and down to serve each other, and help forward the common welfare, each according to his several ability, and all with all their might.

Let us learn a lesson, then, from this quaint parable of the antique world. Let us learn from it that, if we have any special gifts—any sweetness or richness of nature, or any power to brighten and exhilarate the sad hearts of men—we have it not for our own sakes merely, but that we may serve our neighbours with it, and help them to a sweeter, richer, brighter life. All our gifts are but broken and imperfect rays of the glory of God. And how does He use his glory, the glory of his wisdom, the glory of his power, the glory of his love? Does He not devote power, wisdom, love, all that He is and has, to the good of his creatures? And how can we hope to please Him, and to receive more of his glory, save as we devote what He has given us to the service of men whom He made, and loves, and serves?

But some will say, "How willingly would we serve men if we could! But we have no special gift, no great opportunities. We have nothing to give which our neighbours would accept. The little we can do is not worthy the name of service." Is it not? In a forest, or an orchard, there must be trees of many kinds. All cannot be olives, nor all figs,

nor all vines. But if every tree yield its fruit, and the best fruit it can, does not the orchard prosper? Under the larger trees there must be many briars, many brambles—perhaps a score or a hundred of these for every tree that throws lofty branches into the air. And a few of these brambles might get together, and say, “We are of no use; the forest does not need us; men do not care for us. O that we could bear olives, or figs, or grapes! As it is we are good for nothing but to be cut down and cast into the fire. Why should we wait for that? Let us catch fire and burn the forest down.” But need the brambles thus despair of themselves? Ask the birds who dine off the hips and haws of the thorns all the winter through! Ask the boys who pluck blackberries off the briars! Even the bramble, if, instead of catching fire, it will give itself to its proper work, is capable of bearing a fruit which many prize above the sour olive or the too luscious fig, a fruit as sweet, but not so perilous, as the grape. And just as the bramble may always either yield fruit, or store up the sweet juices which turn to fruit, so we, if we will use our few gifts, and the trivial opportunities which every day brings us, may be always either yielding our fruit, or making ready to yield fruit which our neighbours will find both nutritious and sweet.

VII.

The Golden Mice and Emrods.

I SAMUEL VI.

THAT surely is a very curious story which we read in this Chapter. Probably we were all struck with it when we were children, and framed some picture in our minds of Dagon, the fish-god, and the sacred ark, of the golden emrods and the mice. *One* child, I know, used to think of the ark of God as a miniature copy of the ark in which Noah rode the flood, and of the emrods as miniature copies of the rod which budded in Aaron's hand. Probably we all had similar fancies and conjectures. Probably, too, most of us since those early days have had our hearts drawn to other Scriptures more immediately bearing on our life and duty, and have ceased to take much interest in this and other stories which once quickened our curiosity, and wonder, and imagination. It is by no means unlikely that many readers of the Bible are quite unable to say what an "emrod" is. It is almost certain that, excepting only a few scholars whose studies have led them into certain unfrequented by-paths of literature, none of them could explain the purpose for which golden images of mice and emrods were made, or the method in which they were supposed to work.

Yet there are good reasons why this singular Scripture should, if possible, be rescued from the neglect into which

it has fallen. Not only is every Scripture, and this among them, profitable for instruction when once we understand it; not only is it desirable that we should have some help to give our children, whose minds are apt to be greatly taken with Scriptures such as this: but also *this* is only one of many similar Scriptures; to understand this is to get the key to those. Once apprehend the meaning of these golden mice and emrods, and we have the clue to much that the Historical Books record of Egyptian magicians, Babylonian soothsayers and "wise men," Persian magi, and Philistine diviners: we have a clue to many allusions to astrological arts in the poetic and prophetic books of the Bible. Only, to get this clue into our hands, we must travel back many centuries, and enter into a state of thought and conviction very alien to the spirit of modern times. We shall have need of patience, and, in some measure, of "the historical imagination."

In the time of the Judges, nearly four thousand years ago, before ancient Rome and Greece were so much as names, when the Hindus were plunging down, from the mountains of Armenia, on to the fertile plains we now call Hindostan, before the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires were founded—in that early dawn of history the Jews were contending with a score different races for the possession of Palestine. Of these races the Philistines were the last to be conquered, the bravest and the most indomitable. It is one of many signs of the tenacity with which they held the land, that to this day we call it by their name—*Palestine** being only a modern form of the word *Philistine*. As they advanced to the conquest of this lovely and fertile country, the Jews, a true hill-race, swept along the highlands, leaving

The Hebrew word is *Pelêsheth*, which the Vulgate renders indifferently *Philisthi'm*, *Philisthæa* and *Palaesthini*.

many of the rich plains in the hands of the Philistine chiefs. One such plain, hard by the very heart of the land, was long held by them. Its chief cities were five—Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron ; names which are among the few surviving relics of the extinct Philistine language. A covenant or league was formed by the lords of these five cities, an alliance offensive and defensive against the Israelites who were perpetually sweeping down from the hills upon them.

When Eli was old, and Samuel was still being trained for judge, a decisive conflict took place between the men of the plains and the men of the hills. The Israelites were overthrown with great slaughter, and the Ark of God, the palladium of the chosen nation, was carried off by the victorious Philistines.

At this point our story begins. The Philistines took the ark first to the city of Ashdod, their sacred city ; and set it up as a trophy and spoil of war in the temple of Dagon. Next morning they found the image of Dagon, an immense fish with the head and arms of a man, prostrate before the ark, the god of Philistia doing reverence to the God of Israel. This prostration, however, might be purely accidental. And so they set Dagon on his base again : but no, it was no accident ; for the next morning, Dagon was found once more prostrate, while now his head and palms, broken from the trunk, were found lying on the threshold of the temple. “Therefore,” adds the historian, “neither the priests, nor any that come into Dagon’s house, *tread on the threshold* of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day” (ver. 5). I quote that verse because we have, perhaps, a curious confirmation of it, and if so, certainly a curious instance of the way in which customs of worship spread through the East and endure long after their origin has been forgotten, in the fact, that *at this day* in India priests and devotees

leap over the thresholds of their temples, holding them too sacred to be touched by the foot of man.

All Ashdod was in consternation at the defeat of their god. The consternation grew more intense as the people found that the hand of the Lord, the God of Israel, was heavy upon them. The Lord "destroyed" them, and "smote them with emrods," we are told.

And here, that we may have done with a topic not easy nor pleasant to touch, let us raise and lay the question: "What were these emrods?" In brief, they were the disease we call "bleeding piles"—a disease very common in Eastern lands, where the extreme heat induces indisposition to exercise, and the liver is very apt to grow sluggish and weak. The word "emrods" is vernacular English for the Greek compound from which we derive the technical medical terms "hemorrhoids," "hemorrhage," and "hemorrhoidal"—all of which designate a flow of blood. "Emrods" is simply a vulgar corruption of "hemorrhoids."

This painful disease became so prevalent and so fatal in Ashdod that its inhabitants recognized a divine judgment. To be quit of it, they sent the ark to their neighbours of Gath, where there was no temple of Dagon to provoke it. But here, too, the same plague made its appearance. The Gittites sent on the ark to their neighbours of Ekron. The Ekronites were in great alarm. They cried, "They have sent the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people!" Their dismal prognostics were verified. Many died; many were smitten with emrods; while an army of field mice devoured their harvest.

Always in reading of these ancient plagues we have to bear in mind, that we can form only a faint conception of them from our own experience. We must go to the East for parallels to them. A parallel to this plague of mice is furnished in the recent history of Ceylon. In 1848, the

coffee-crop of that fertile island was utterly destroyed by mice, and the people, losing their staple harvest, were reduced to the most terrible misery and want. No wonder, then, that, smitten by three plagues—by death, by emrods, and by mice—there was “a deadly destruction in the city of Ekron,” and that feeling “the hand of the Lord to be very heavy,” “the cry of the city went up to heaven.”

Evidently, it was time to call in whatever wisdom and piety were in the land. The priests and the diviners responded to the call. Their counsel was, “Send back the ark, and do not send it away empty. Prepare a trespass-offering. Make five emrods of gold, one for each city of the League, and five mice of gold. Put them into a chest. Put ark and chest into a new cart drawn by milch cows which have never felt the yoke. Start them, and let them go where they will. If they forsake their calves, and take the road to the hills, that will be an omen, a sign that the God of Israel is guiding them and returning from us to his own people, a sign that we have hit on the right expedient for the present distress.” The story goes on to tell us that this counsel was taken: and that the cows, “*lowing as they went*,” lowing for their abandoned calves, took the straight way to the hills, turning aside neither to the right hand nor to the left, and that the men of Israel, busy with their wheat harvest, stood up among the sheaves, and shouted with a joy beyond the joy of harvest as they recognized the returning ark of the Lord.

These poor cows again, dumb though not mute martyrs, carry our thoughts to India. Just as in Palestine, cows which had never known the yoke were devoted to a religious service, so in India, young and unused bulls are consecrated to the service of the gods. The emblems of Siva are stamped on their quarters while they are still young, and from that moment they are sacred. In Benares,

the most sacred city of India, the narrow over-hanging streets are thronged with these "holy bulls" which have never known the yoke, and which no man may strike or injure, although they help themselves to whatever they fancy and obstruct the course of traffic. The unchanging East is often our best commentary on the Bible.

But now, what did the diviners of Philistia mean by *the golden mice and emrods*? In what way were these images to relieve their bodies from disease and their fields from the swarming mice? It is the answer to this question which yields us a clue to many dark and involved Scriptures.*

At first we might think that these golden images were meant simply as a recognition of the power of that God whose seat was the ark. No doubt they had this meaning. They were a confession that the emrods and the mice came from Him, that they were signs of his power and anger; they were a confession that the Philistines had done wrong to offer violence to "the ark of his strength." But this is only a partial answer to our question. It would have been more natural to any but diviners† simply to offer the usual beasts as a sacrifice or trespass-offering to the offended God. Why did they rather make tiny golden images? What *divination* was there in these? What did the diviners, or magicians, mean by them?

* Amos v. 26, for example, and all the passages which mention the *teraphim*. For *teraphim* were probably talismanic figures; so possibly were "the Blind and the Lame," *cæci et claudi*, of 2 Sam. v. 6—8.

† That the Philistines were devoted to the arts of divination, and thought to excel in them, is apparent from many indirect allusions in the Hebrew prophecies. Thus, for instance, Isaiah (chap. ii. ver. 6) assures the Jews of his generation that God had forsaken them,—

"Because they fill themselves from the East,
And are diviners like the Philistines."

The fact that the Philistines were diviners *par excellence*, of course makes the talismanic interpretation of the golden mice and emrods the more probable.

The real and full answer to this question comes from the astrological systems of antiquity. Up to about three hundred years ago all men, or almost all, European no less than Asiatic, believed that the stars had a strange mystic influence on the health, fortunes, and destiny of men, cities, kingdoms. They set themselves to read and interpret the heavens; to reduce their interpretations to a science, a system, that they might not only tell, but affect, the fortunes of men. In the East, in ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, as also in Greece and Rome, astrology was a learned profession. No enterprise of any moment was entered upon except under the direction of magi, diviners, augurs. Colleges were established in which this science was taught and studied. Its adepts were statesmen, and the friends and counsellors of princes. Throughout the East the diviner is still a power in the State and in private life, though here in the West he has no power, save as a gipsy promising husbands to foolish maids, or as a preacher expounding unfulfilled prophecies. But in ancient times no profession was so lucrative, or offered such prizes to ambition. And this profession was based, as I have said, upon the universal belief, the sincere and profound conviction, that human destiny was foreshadowed and ordained by planetary and stellar influences, that all earthly events were but passing reflections of the secrets written in the ancient heavens. Many references to this conviction are found in the Bible, none more beautiful and graphic than those in the Book of Job. Thus, for instance, Job speaks of those who "ban days," and are "of skill to rouse the Dragon"—the Dragon being a heavenly constellation, the enemy of light, and therefore of man. He affirms that God is—

"Maker of the Wain, the Giant, and the Cluster,"

i.e., the constellations we call the Bear, Orion, and the

Pleiades ; God therefore is lord of their secrets and influences : nay, more, this Maker of the stars is also a—

“ Doer of great things past finding out,”

wonders and mysteries which no diviner can foretell. Nay, the poet puts even into the mouth of Jehovah the challenge—

“ Canst *thou* fasten the links of the Cluster?
Canst thou loosen the fetters of the Giant?
Canst thou bring forth the constellations in their season?
The Wain and her offspring, canst thou guide them?
Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven?
Canst thou determine their influence upon the earth ? ”

Though these words are put into the mouth of Jehovah Himself, they imply that the stars have an influence on the fates of men ; they adopt the terms and conceptions which the astrological science of that time had made familiar in the mouths of men. For the contemporaries of Job believed that these constellations had a sovereign influence on human destiny ; and that the diviners were able to avert their evil influence or to secure their good influence, or, at lowest, to predict what their influences would be : they held that diviners *could* fasten the links of the Pleiades and unloose the fetters of the gigantic Orion, that they did know the ordinances of heaven, and could in some measure determine their influence upon the earth.

This knowledge and its exercise the diviners, as I have said, set themselves to reduce to a system. They determined the kind of influence which each of the planets exerted on those who were born under it ; and in our own language we still have traces of the prevalence of this system. Thus, for instance, we still speak of some men as having a “ jovial ” temperament, and of other men as having a “ saturnine ” temperament. And our words, according to their history and derivation, really mean that the “ saturnine ” man was

born under the influences of the planet "Saturn," and the "jovial" man under the influence of the planet Jupiter or "Jove." The ancient astrologers, however, were not content simply to mark under what planet a man was born. They studied the relative position of his planet to the other stars. To facilitate their calculations they divided the whole heaven of stars into constellations, into the signs of the zodiac ; and spoke of the Serpent, the Scorpion, the Dragon, the Giant, just as we still speak of the Bear, the Lion, the Fishes, or the Virgin. These constellations were supposed to modify the influence of the planet under which a man was born ; an unlucky planet might at the moment of his birth be in a lucky sign or house, a fortunate planet might be in, or near, an ominous constellation. All these points, the relation of the ruling planet to all the constellations, had to be taken into account before an accomplished diviner would cast a nativity, or tell a fortune, or pronounce whether this moment or that were favourable to the commencement of a grave enterprise. It was this systematized knowledge of the stars and their supposed influence on human destinies, which lay at the base of the wisdom of the magicians of Egypt, the diviners of Chaldea, the magi of Media, the oracular priests of Greece, the augurs of Rome. Before all they were astrologers, though they also studied other sciences and could draw omens from the flight of birds, from the entrails of fowls, from dreams, from chance words that met the eye.

But how were they to turn their knowledge to practical account ? To foretell the future was much ; but how much more would it be, if they could also shape the future, if they could save men from the calamities they foresaw, or redeem them from plagues which had fallen upon them ? To this problem also the ancient diviners applied themselves, and not, as they thought, without good success. Indeed they

invented many occult methods of either injuring or benefiting men and States, of which we need mark only one. This is the *talismanic** method alluded to in the passage before us. For instead of reading, "Ye shall make *images* of your emrods and *images* of your mice," we ought to read, "Ye shall make *talismans* of your emrods and *talismans* of your mice." We get the word "talisman" from the Arabic. The original meaning of the word is doubtful; but the Greeks understood it to denote certain magical characters which were supposed to carry a supernatural force, in short, what we call a *charm*.

From the ancient writers of Arabia we learn how a talisman, or charm, of this kind was composed. They held that all earthly things are but shadows of heavenly things, and that the celestial forms have an overruling influence on all earthly forms of life. Thus, for instance, if they wished to give a man a talisman that would make him safe against the bite of serpents, they got the exact moment of his birth. Their books told them what planet "ruled his birth," what planet was then in full lustre. They waited for the moment in which this planet was "out of combustion," *i. e.*, not shining at its strength, the moment in which thus shorn of its lustre it entered into the constellation which they called the Serpent. The favourable moment having arrived, they made a tiny stone or metal image of a serpent, engraved certain mystic letters upon it; and here was the talisman. So long as the man carried *that* about him, no serpent could

* The Hebrew word in 1 Sam. vi. 5 is *tsalmē*; and this is closely connected with the Arabic *thelesm* and *talismath*, the Chaldaic *tsalmanija*, and the English *talisman*. All these are evidently forms of one and the same word. The Hebrew form seems to have had for its root—meaning a *shadow*. Talismans *shadowed forth* destiny. Of course the word is often used merely to denote an image, or a likeness, without any sub-reference to talismanic arts. It would not be safe to find a talismanic allusion in the word, except where, as here and in Amos v. 26, the context implies or confirms it.

hurt him. Ancient literature is full of marvellous stories * of the power of these talismans. For instance, an Arabian author gravely assures us that he knew of a Saracen servant who was bitten by a scorpion: his master healed him by applying to the wound a talismanic stone, on which, when the moon was in the sign *Scorpio*, the figure of a scorpion had been engraved. An ancient Greek geographer, Ptolemy, tells a similar story of a city in Syria, in the middle of which a stone, having on it the figure of a scorpion, was set up on a wall. Whoever was bitten by one of these pests, hastened to the wall, took down the magical stone, applied it to the bite, and was immediately healed. Strange and incredible as these stories sound to us, there can be no doubt that the ancients sincerely believed them. Almost every city had its talisman, or its palladium, on which its prosperity depended or its exemption from some plague to which its position exposed it. At Grand Cairo, where the inhabitants were often seized by crocodiles, they at last made a talisman, a leaden crocodile inscribed with an Egyptian charm. No sooner was it buried in the foundation of a temple than the crocodiles grew harmless; no sooner did a conqueror cause it to be melted than the crocodiles resumed their ancient ferocity. Constantinople, which suffers much from storms, had its talisman—a figure balanced on one foot in a brazen ship. While it stood entire upon its column, the tempestuous waves were stayed, no vessel suffered shipwreck. When the sea began to be as unruly as before, search was made, and it was found that some fragments of the ship, none knew how, had been broken off. They were restored, and once more there was calm. The

* I take most of the stories which follow from that repertory of curious learning, the works of Master John Gregorie, vol. i. chap. viii. (A.D. 1684), where he cites the various authorities from which he has gathered them.

inhabitants were so impressed by this singular occurrence that they determined to try an experiment. They purposely took away some of the brass rigging, and no vessel could approach the coast; they replaced it, and the adverse winds were hushed.

Of all the diviners of ancient and modern times, from Balaam down through Simon Magus to Cagliostro, I suppose none have so deeply impressed the popular imagination as Apollonius of Tyana.* He travelled through the ancient world, blessing men and cities with talismans of the most sovereign potency—talismans against storks, tortoises, horses, against torrents, and against the north wind. What a benefactor he would have been had he left us a talisman against the east wind! But that which is most to our purpose is, that coming to Antioch, and finding it infested with a plague of scorpions, he made a little scorpion of brass, set it up on a pillar in the midst of the city, and forthwith, says the veracious historian, “the scorpions vanished out of all their coasts.”

That these stories are told in simple good faith, that the ancients honestly and profoundly believed in the virtue of talismans, is beyond a doubt. If we wanted proof, we might find it in this singular fact, that the Primitive Christians, † within fifty years after the death of St. John, were driven to ask, “If God be the Creator and Lord of the world, how comes it to pass that the talismans of Apollonius have so much overruled the course of nature? for we see

* Apollonius was born nearly at the same time as Christ, and lived about a hundred years. He was believed to have raised the dead, healed the sick, cast out devils, freed a young man from a lamia, or vampire, with which he was enamoured, prophesied, seen in one country events that were occurring in another. He “filled the world with the fame of his miracles, and of his sanctity.” The pagan writers constantly oppose him to Christ.

† See Justin Martyr. *Res. ad Orthod. quæst. xxiv. 2, 5.*

that they have stilled the waves of the sea and the raging of the winds, and have prevailed against noisome flies and the incursions of wild beasts." If Jews and Christians could make that admission, we need not feel any surprise at finding that the Philistines believed in the efficacy of talismans, that they made talismanic emrods and talismanic mice to scare away the disease that preyed upon their strength, and the pest that made war upon their fields. Christians of much later date than those who were dismayed at the marvels of Apollonius have not only believed in talismans, but made them. Christians, indeed, were the most learned astrologers of the Middle Ages. One of them, Paracelsus, has left us directions how to shape a talisman against the very plague which ravaged the Philistine fields. To rid a house of mice, he bids us "make an iron mouse, under the conjunction of Saturn and Mars, and in the House of *Upsilon*. Inscribe upon its belly, *Albamatalox*," with other words of the magical jargon. "Then place the talisman in the middle of the house, and the vermin shall instantly leave the place." If Paracelsus, a modern Christian of profound learning and noble gifts, could boldly teach *that*, how can we blame Philistine lords, who lived twelve centuries before Christ was born, for believing that golden images of mice and emrods would prove a charm against their plagues? how blame them for believing that, so long as these talismans were laid up before the ark, and the ark remained in the land, they would be safe—at least from hemorrhoids and field-mice?

I am not sure, even, that modern science does well to assume that there is no foundation for a faith so primitive and wide-spread as that which lies at the basis of astrology. In an universe so coherent and harmonious, in which the most unexpected relations and correlations are perpetually dis-

covered, who shall say that the stars have *no* influence upon human destiny, that there are no prophecies written in the ancient heavens which it concerns us to know? It would be wiser, I think, and even more scientific to say, "That may very well be. All we know at present is that, if there be such an influence we cannot trace it, nor discover its laws." For myself, at least, I am not prepared to admit that the "wise men" of antiquity were such fools as they are often held to have been, nor such rogues. I cannot bring myself to believe that they wittingly palmed obvious and monstrous delusions upon their fellows, that they pretended to powers which they knew they did not possess. I should be no whit surprised if science were yet to discover new secrets in the sky, new harmonies between heaven and earth. It may be that as the old Greek historians, whom our fathers set down as credulous setters forth of fables, are now proved to have been accurate and learned chroniclers, so also the diviners and astrologers, whose science we reject as mere imposture, will yet justify themselves, and help our sons to a wider scientific knowledge than we have reached.

But whatever influences and predictions are, or are not, in the stars, whatever occult and mysterious harmonies of earth with heaven have yet to be discovered, our principal concern is to know that God worketh all things; that it is *He* who brings forth the constellations in their season—*He* who has set ordinances in heaven, and determined their influences upon the earth—*He*, the Doer of great things past finding out and wonders that cannot be numbered. He *may* shape our destinies and predict them by the celestial signs, just as He *may* administer his providence by the angels who excel in strength and wait to do his will. These are questions which we may discuss, and on which we may differ. The one question we need to have settled beyond all doubt is, that, whether by subordinate ministers or with-

out them, it is He who shapes our lot and guides our feet ; hat however many servants He may or may not employ, we are still and always in his hands. If He is our Father, and our reconciled Father, if He loves us and cares for us, it is enough ; for if not a sparrow can fall to the ground without our Father, how, without Him, should a star have any influence over us, whether adverse or benign ? If He is our Father, and in his minute tender care of us numbers the very hairs of our heads, how should any angel, be its intents wicked or charitable, be other to us than a spirit of health, a minister of grace ? The universe may be more complex and concordant than we suppose ; heaven and earth may be more full of august and solemn ministries ; between the mighty music of the spheres and the rhythms of human life there may be antiphonies, echoes, responses, too subtle or too vast for our ears to grasp : but so long as the universe is *his*, and all its innumerable hosts do his will, we may at all times hear the sentinel—

“Who moves about from place to place,
And whispers to the worlds of space,
In the deep night, that all is well.”

God *is* with us and in us ; and his presence is the true talisman : trusting in this, we are secure in all perils and all vicissitudes. If He make us sore, He will bind up ; if He bruise, his hands will make whole. In six troubles He will deliver us, nor in seven shall evil touch us. So that He be with us and for us, we may laugh at ravage and famine, at change and death ; for then even the stones of the field will be in league with us, and the stars in their courses will fight on our behalf. If we love Him, nothing can in anywise harm us, for nothing can separate us from his love. In Him all things are ours—life and death, heaven and earth—things present and things to come.

VIII.

"Don't Cry over Spilt Water."

2 SAMUEL XIV. 14.

A VERY wise woman was the Wise Woman of Tekoah. One sentence of hers has lived through thirty centuries; it still lingers on the lips and in the hearts of men. Which of us will leave even so modest a bequest as this to the ages that come after us?

The Wise Woman makes but a single appearance on the historic scene, yet she will never be forgotten. In her interview with King David she only once rises, from the facts of the particular case she had in hand, to one of those broad and rapid generalizations which have an inestimable value for us as well as for king David, for all men as well as for us. But for a single sentence, a sentence which simply expresses a general truth in an appropriate and graphic figure, we should hardly have cared to remember her. It is by right of this apt beautiful saying that she holds an earthly immortality. Ah, how God must have bound us each to each, what subtle far-reaching links must bind all the children of Adam into one, how solemn and mysterious an influence the humblest of us may exert on all, when the obscure Prophetess of that dark age and distant land can still touch our hearts and shape our thoughts!

"We must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again."—What strong

sad words these are! sad with an infinite despair concerning the dead, as also concerning the living—for they too must die; and yet strong with the patience which can endure even the burden of that dark hopeless mystery. As we ponder them, the Prophetess seems to look upon us from the darkness of the past with wan pensive face, and to warn us in mournful yet kindly accents that we cease fretting at the inevitable. "The dead are dead. The living must die. They and we are as water which, once spilt, cannot be gathered up again. It is of no use to cry over spilt water. Rather, drink of any fresh sweet cup which is still left you. Amnon is dead, and all the weeping in the world will not bring him back to life; but Absalom is alive, and though he too must die, for the present he is young and very comely. Take *him* to thy heart, O foolish David, that sittest in the dust mourning for dust, and let him comfort thee for the son thou hast lost. Why mourn and weep over the water which the thirsty earth hath sucked from thy thirsty eyes, when fresh fair water in another and more comely cup is offered to thy lips?"

But what heartless Epicurean doctrine have we here? This is but an ancient version of "To-morrow we die; let us therefore eat, and drink, and make merry to-day." It is the philosophy of "the Styx," not of the Church. It may suit brutes who live only for the present, but will not suit men who, with large discourse of reason, look before and after. What father, what mother, ever forgot their first-born because other babes were vouchsafed them? Who can cease to remember what has been in the past, or to forecast what may be or might have been in the future, because the table of the present is sumptuously furnished and adorned?

Yet before we condemn the Wise Woman's saying as tending to a base and sensual Epicureanism, let us observe that it carried comfort to King David, who was very far

from living in "the Styx," though he may have spent a day or two in it now and then. The words of the Prophetess did not teach *him* to despair of the dead, but to shew mercy to the living. For three years he had wept for Amnon, "mourning for his son every day;" was it not time that he ceased to weep? For three years he had steadfastly refused to see Absalom, who, though he had grievously sinned in killing Amnon, had not sinned without the foulest provocation, but had murdered Amnon only to avenge his sister's murdered innocence: and now that King David's soul began to yearn toward Absalom, was it not time that he should "fetch home again his banished son?" The water was spilt; and to spill more water was not the way to gather *that* up again. Amnon was dead; but for David to treat Absalom as one who, though alive, was dead to him, would not restore Amnon to life. Grief for the dead could not absolve the living from their duties—their duties to the living. Men and women, who have grave imperative work to do in the world, must not waste the time and energy they need for the discharge of duty in crying over spilt water. Let them rather accept the facts of life as they find them, spilt water and all; let them accept even those sorrowful losses and changes which seem to obscure all the joys of life and to take away the very heart for duty, and under their new sorrowful conditions do the best they can for God and man.

This, I take it, was what the Wise Woman meant—not selfish Epicurean indulgence, but manful godly heroism. As applied to David her words carried this lesson:—"Death is the common event, too common to be an evil. Get good out of it then, what good you may and can. Do not let it weaken, but rather strengthen, you for the duties which remain to you. Do not let it alienate you from the living, but rather bind them to you in closer and more tender ties."

Their larger and more general application, *the principle of*

the words, I take to be :—" Don't fret over the inevitable, the irreparable. The past is past, and cannot be recalled : therefore be the more intent on a wise use of the present. Instead of crying over spilt water, or trying in vain to gather it up from the dust—you will only disfigure your face and pollute your fingers if you do that—betake you to the fountain of living water, drink of the untainted perennial spring. Let your feet wear a track which shall guide other feet to its pure waters. Let your example be a standing invitation to your neighbours, that they also may repair to the fountain which no dust can defile, and drink of the clear life-giving waters which flow on for ever."

Now if we take, first, the more limited, and, then, the more general application of this principle—that it is vain to fret at the inevitable—and bring them into connection with our own experience of life and death, we shall find them both instructive and consolatory.

I. Let us apply this principle to the limited facts of death and bereavement. Each and all of us, "we must needs die." We know that, and confess it. Yet when death comes to us, we are commonly taken by surprise. If, for instance, our neighbour's child die, *that* does not seem to us so very shocking and unnatural ; we are soon ready with the commonplaces about death and sorrow and hope which have probably irritated more afflicted souls than they have comforted. But if *our* child die, we find the commonplaces which our neighbours now administer to us singularly worthless and ineffective. We are taken at unawares. The unexpectedness of our bereavement embitters our bereavement ; and, not infrequently, there is some resentment in our grief : we have, or we conceive that we have, had an injustice done us as well as a loss inflicted on us. Why should *our* child have been taken rather than another's ? With the whole

world for his field, why should Death have picked out and plucked just the one flower, or one of the few flowers, which made our little garden gay? And we nurse our sorrow, which is often also in part a wrath, refusing to be comforted. We fold our listless hands, and, because the one task is taken from us which we loved, we neglect other tasks. The child or the friend whom we have lost takes a special dearness in our thoughts; and, in our sad tender worship of his memory, we too often undervalue and fail in our duty to the living. We think we have a right, a right hardly and bitterly earned, to indulge our grief. That stern practical duties should intrude upon it, and call our thoughts away from it, we resent as a fresh wrong. In short, we insist on crying over our spilt water, and on making futile efforts to gather it up again, neglecting meanwhile, or wilfully, if not angrily, putting from our lips the unspilt water, which God has gathered into many precious vessels for our comfort and refreshment.

Now all this, natural as it is, is nevertheless wrong. "Can it be wrong if it be natural?" Surely, yes: for our nature is weak and fallen; all its issues, therefore, cannot be good and right. Our imperfect nature is not the standard of right and wrong, but God's perfect will. And there are many things opposed to that will which, in our varying moods, seem natural to us, and are natural to us, and for our indulgence in which we seek no other justification.

That the resentment, the hopelessness, the abandonment to grief which too often characterize our sorrow for departed friends are alien to the will of God there can be little doubt. Even the Wise Woman of Tekoah teaches us that we should set a term, a limit, to our grief; that we should not suffer it to absorb all the thoughts and affections of the soul, or to withdraw us from the duties and solaces still left to us. Amnon is dead, but the comely Absalom still lives. Let us

love him, and serve him, and gather from his love to us what comfort and strength we may. The bereavement we have suffered may have affected, it may have shot a disastrous change through, all the conditions of our life. Well, there is no help for it. We are not lords of fate, and cannot shape our circumstances as we please. These are ordered for us by God, who speaks to us through the facts of life no less than through the words of Inspiration. And it is of no use to kick against the goads to which his providence has harnessed us: if we do that, we shall only add the smart of fresh wounds to the dull aching of the stroke which has already fallen on us. Fretting will not alter the inevitable. We *must* accept it, whether with our will or against it. Let us then accept it with a patient cheerfulness, and so take the sting out of it. 'Tis weak, 'tis useless to sit down and weep over spilt water when we have yet a long steep path to climb, and many around us who look to us for guidance and refreshment. Let us be up and doing, and, in serving the living, hallow and soften our grief for the dead.

But what is this? Have we escaped the Epicurean "stye" only to wander in the cold windy "portico" of the Stoics? We might well think we had, were this all that the Wise Woman has to teach us. It is not difficult to understand how, were we to stop here, many a bereaved parent or child might say, "All that is very well for men cast in an heroic mould: they may find comfort in it; but I am weak: in me the crushing sense of loss bears down the sense of duty. Why remind me that it is of no use to cry over spilt water? I know it, and hence my tears. I weep the more because I weep in vain. How am I to get hope from the loss of hope? If the water could be gathered up, I would not sit and grieve. *Then* I would strain every nerve, however faint the prospect of success. But now what can I do save mourn to despair over an irreparable loss?"

There is comfort in the Wise Woman's words even for those who are thus beggared of hope and "distract with grief." *We* may find in them a larger and more consolatory meaning than any of which she was conscious. For, observe: this spilt water of hers—what after all becomes of it? Though *we* cannot raise it up again, it nevertheless does rise again; no particle of it is lost. For a little while it lies in the dust, and helps to make that fruitful. But no sooner does the sun shine upon it with a fervent heat than it evaporates; its baser and more earthly parts remain in the earth to fructify it, but its major and more ethereal parts rise through the air, rise toward heaven, and put on new and more perfect forms, forms which, though invisible to us, are no less real than those it wore while we could see it. The water spilt upon the ground may be gathered up again; it must be gathered up again. It will be drawn up into the skies, to form part of a gracious cloud, which by-and-by will fall in enriching showers on the parched fields; and, that purpose once served, it will be again lifted to the skies, again to fall, again to rise,—so passing into a life of perpetual service. Nay, as it falls, it may reflect the splendours of the sun, and help to form the gracious beautiful rainbow which carries a prophecy of hope over all the earth and lifts all hearts to heaven.

And is there not hope, is there not comfort, in that? Our child, our parents, our kinsfolk and friends "must needs die, and be as water spilt upon the ground." We cannot, by weeping for them, win them back to life, any more than by crying over it we can gather the spilt water up again. But God, who is our sun, will shine upon them. The eternal Light will raise, purify, ennoble them, consecrating them to an eternal service, perhaps causing them to carry hope and consolation to many dejected hearts. As there are many mansions in our Father's house, so also there are

many ministries in his service. And our departed friends, invisible to us, are in his eye, in his employ, living not less really, but more really than while they were still with us. Let us not then degrade them in our thoughts. Let us neither weep for them as though they were simply dust mingling with dust, nor seek by so much as a wish to draw them down from the service in which is their rest.

II. But if we bring the more general application of this principle—that it is vain to fret at the inevitable—home to our experience, we shall find that it has instruction for all men, and not only for the sorrowful and bereaved.

The vanity of fretting at the irreparable is a principle capable of many and large applications. Not only must we needs die, we all do die daily. Our whole physical structure, as we are often reminded, changes every few years: our mental structure changes faster still. The body of our flesh does not contain even one of the particles of which it was composed a few years since; and in these years our mental make, if indeed any vital process of growth have taken place, has passed through many vicissitudes and shifted into many new forms. We are each of us many men in one. If we have half-a-dozen photographs taken in a day, the general resemblance is not more marked than the differences of expression. Shew them to a stranger, and he will often fail to see that the same man sat for all. But if we *are*, much more *have we been*, many men. And as we recall the past, as we remember our former selves, and compare what we are with what we were, if we see some changes for which we are thankful, we also see much which inspires regret; and as the years pass, and the inevitable changes ensue, we are too apt to waste time in crying over spilt water and trying to gather it up again.

"I am not the man I was," is sooner or later the language,

of most men ; "not so quick in apprehension, nor so fresh in feeling, nor so strong whether for the encounter with temptation or the discharge of duty. What opportunities I have lost—opportunities that will never recur! What taints I have contracted—taints which all the waters in the sea cannot remove, and all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten! What might I not have been had I not suffered time to slip through my fingers unused? What might I not do now, with my larger knowledge of life, if I possessed the vigour and ardour which once I had!" When this language is sincerely used, when we thus look back on our "dead selves," bemoaning them instead of making them "stepping-stones to higher things;" when we are thus haunted with the ghosts of lost opportunities and past sins, we are filled with a regret singularly like the sorrow of bereavement. And this regret, like that sorrow, is very apt to weaken us still more, and to interpose between us and the duties we yet have to discharge. *We lose time in mourning the loss of time. We waste strength in sorrowing over a strength that is gone. We miss present opportunities while lamenting opportunities that are past.*

O that we could understand once for all that it is useless, and worse than useless, to cry over spilt water! The past is past; and it will be wise of us to "let the dead past bury its dead," and not to expend the little strength that is left us in digging graves for it and watering them with our tears. No self-upbraidings, however mournful or passionate, will bring back a single bygone opportunity, or remove a single stain, or restore a single energy which has been misspent. Here we stand, embodying in our present characters the manifold result of past experiences. It is vain to mourn that we are what we are. The weaker we are, the more need to husband our strength; the more frequent and ample the opportunities we have missed, the more we should strive to improve those which are still open to us; the more we have

sinned, the harder will be our conflict with evil. *These*, such as we have made them, are the facts with which we have now to deal, and they are not to be washed out of their natural shape by any tears we may lavish on them. Our true wisdom will be, not to fret at them and their stubborn hardness, but to accept them and make the best we can of them. The past has given form to the present conditions of our life ; within these we *must* move and act : and, if we be men in understanding, men and not children or babes, we shall address ourselves to walking within the narrow difficult limits which they impose upon us, instead of bemoaning that by past heedlessness we have made them so difficult and so narrow.

"Are we not, then, to repent of our sins and mistakes?" Assuredly we are : this also is one of the inevitable conditions, one of the painful results, of past weakness ; and we must submit to it. But a godly repentance is far removed from that moody indolent grief in which we too often indulge as we review the past. The true cleansing virtue of repentance does not lie in the tears we shed, but in the amendment which, trusting in a higher strength than our own, we hopefully attempt. To repent is not simply to weep over, it is "to leave the sins we loved before." And in nothing, perhaps, is the healthy bracing spirit of the Gospel more conspicuous than in this,—that when we are truly sorry for our sins we find that our sorrow is of a kind which worketh *life* ; that while we are still mourning over our manifold offences, it virtually says to us, "Leave all those with Him who has made an atonement for the sin of the world. Cast that heavy sorrowful burden on Him who careth for you. And now, with a lightened conscience and a cheerful trust, address yourselves to the work that lies before you. Forget that which is behind ; press onward to that which is before."

Not that the Gospel, strong and gracious as it is, detaches their natural consequences from our past transgressions because we are sorry for them, or severs the links which, in the spiritual as in the natural world, bind effects to their causes. It does not do that. We still bear the scars of the old wounds, scars that often ache and throb. We are still very open to temptation in those respects in which we have yielded to temptation. The evil bias of former habits often deflects our souls from their true course. But still the Gospel does teach us to regard all that evil past as belonging to a life with which we have now done. It teaches us that we have begun a new life ; and though its conditions are not so happy and auspicious as they might have been had our past been more wisely ordered, the Gospel bids us accept our conditions such as they are with manly resolution and cheerfulness ; and it reinforces our flagging energies with the assurance of a Divine help, and with the large bright hope of ultimate victory over evil in every form. The water which might have strengthened and refreshed us is spilt ; it cannot be gathered up again : but here, through the grace of God, is a new costly cup filled to the very brim with the water of life—a water which, as we drink it, will change into a strengthening gladdening wine.

Nay, more : though *we* cannot gather up the spilt water, God can, and does. The sun of his love shines down on the earth on which it has fallen, and lo, it rises from the earth in new and purer forms ! All the useful and helpful elements of our past experience are gathered up by Him, and detached from the polluting dust with which they were blent. From our very sins and errors and mistakes God evolves a gracious teaching for us, so soon as we are able to hear it. The memory of the transgressions we deplore goes with us into the new life, no longer to threaten and affright us, but to deepen our love for Him who has redeemed us,

to supply the dark shadows before which the lights of hope and joy burn with a more cheerful and welcome radiance. The recollection of past opportunities neglected or abused becomes an incentive to a more diligent use of the opportunities still vouchsafed us. The very tears we have shed are drawn up into the spiritual heaven, to fall in fertilizing showers on ground barren but for them; and as they fall, the Sun of Righteousness shines full upon them, and lo, a new bow of hope stretches across our brightening heaven, giving us the welcome assurance that, unfruitful as we have been in the past, henceforth seed-time and harvest shall never fail us.

IX.

One Heart and One Step.*

"Fifty thousand who could keep rank ; they were not of double heart."
Or, more accurately: "Fifty thousand who could keep rank, who were not of a heart and a heart."—1 CHRONICLES xii. 33.

THE Bible is surely the most comprehensive of books. Nothing human is alien to it. It contains whatever interests the minds of men, whatever touches their hearts, whatever illustrates their life. Who, for instance, would have thought to find the muster-rolls of an army in the Word of God? Who would have thought that these ancient documents could have become profitable, as St. Paul says all Scripture is, for instruction, for conviction, for setting men right and keeping them right? Yet here, in the sacred history, in this single Chapter, we have five lists, or muster-rolls, five authentic documents from the Hebrew archives ; and these lists are so illustrated with note and comment as that they become full of interest and instruction to all subsequent generations.

How valuable and instructive these apparently worthless lists would be to the Jews of later times we may see at a glance. Nearly five centuries since, here, in England, there was long war between the Houses of Lancaster and York ; in this War of the Roses the great bulk of the ancient

* A Sermon to the Robin Hoods, Preached at Nottingham.

English nobility perished. If our historians could recover an authentic list of the leaders in that war, illustrated by some contemporary hand with marginal notes on the claims and services of the distinguished men who espoused either cause, would they not count it among their chief treasures, and gladly give it a place in their chronicles? Would not as many of us as study the history of our race feel that such a document was almost of priceless value? In like manner, nearly three thousand years ago, "there was long war between the House of Saul and the House of David," in which "David waxed stronger and stronger, and the House of Saul waxed (*waned* would seem the more appropriate word) weaker and weaker." In this war the fate of Israel hung in suspense. What could more profoundly interest any patriotic Jew of after ages than to trace the war through all its stages and vicissitudes? What would be more valuable to him than ancient documents which gave him authentic information of the princes and captains who fought on either side, which marked the several crises at which they espoused the rival causes, and recorded the exploits by which they had deserved well of their country?

To us, indeed, this patriotic interest in the muster-rolls of David's army may be wanting, since we are not of the Hebrew blood. But here another excellence of the Bible comes to our aid. Although the historians of the old Testament were men of the most national and exclusive temperament, although we can trace the Hebrew character and the Hebrew bias in all they wrote, yet they were so overruled by the Spirit of God that their writings are even more human and universal in their tone than they are Hebrew and local. It seems almost impossible for them to copy the pedigree of any noble Jewish family without adding some touch of description or reflection which either lights up the past history of man or comes straight home to every

heart. There is hardly one of those long lists of names, from which we commonly turn in weariness, in which we may not find an incidental note or remark full of valuable suggestion. It is in such a list, for example, that we learn that "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."^{*} It is in such a list that we light on Lamech's "Song of the Sword."[†] It is in such a list that we meet Jabez, "who was more honourable than his brethren," and are allowed to overhear the pathetic prayer of that brave chieftain—"Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me."[‡] And it is from another such list, a mere dry catalogue of names, that we get almost our only glimpse of the life of Joseph's brethren and children in the land of Goshen, and learn how their homesteads and fruitful fields were ravaged by the desert clans.[§] In short, there is no "dry" place in Scripture in which, if we look for it, we may not find a little verdure or light on some spring of pleasant water; there is not a pedigree or catalogue that is not adorned with some scrap of history or poetry which the world, if it only knew of it, would not willingly let die.

Take, as a final illustration, the Chapter before us. I suppose many of you have never read it, that you have glanced at it, and passed it by as a mere barren list of names in which you had no possible interest or concern. No interest! You could not make a greater mistake, unless, indeed, you have no taste for history, for dramatic dialogue, for military adventure, for pithy pungent suggestions. Glance at it again, and mark how much, besides mere names, it contains and implies. Most of us have the vaguest and most inadequate impression of the means by which David rose to the

^{*} Genesis v. 24.

[†] Genesis iv. 23. 24-

[‡] 1 Chronicles iv. 10.

[§] 1 Chronicles vii, 21—23.

throne. The popular conception seems to be that, for a few dark months, he haunted the Cave of Adullam, where there resorted to him "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented," and that by the aid of these ragged followers he conquered the grand military monarchy of Israel, led by Saul, one of the bravest captains of the time; whereas the fact is, that for many years David was slowly gathering to himself all the finest and most patriotic spirits in Israel, the most warlike and accomplished soldiers, organizing them with the most faithful pains and care; till from Hebron, where he was elected king, he could launch against the House of Saul a splendidly organized army of more than three hundred thousand men, officered by the most gallant and skilful captains of a warlike race.

The muster-rolls of this Chapter yield one of many proofs of the extreme care with which those who flocked to David's standard were organized. They carefully mark the successive periods at which first one band of brave men and then another rallied to his cause. And on these rolls there are brief notes, *possibly contributed by the hand of David himself*, of the special qualities of these men, of the warlike exercises and weapons in which they were individually expert, of the exploits they had performed, or of any dramatic incidents which had marked their adhesion to his standard.

The First Muster-Roll (vv. 1—7) records the names of certain captains of the tribe of Benjamin, Saul's tribe, who attached themselves to David while he was still forbidden the presence of the king; and carefully marks that these men and their followers were expert in the use of the sling and the bow, and that by long practice they had made themselves as skilful in the use of the left hand as of the right.

The Second Muster-Roll (vv. 8—15) records the names of certain sons of Gad who separated themselves to David when he dwelt "in the fortress toward the desert"—*i.e.* the fortified rock—which is elsewhere called "the Cave," or "the Hold" of Adullam. These Gadites are described in Oriental terms of praise. Men of might, men of war expert in battle, they could handle shield and buckler; their faces were like the faces of lions, their feet as swift as those of roes cantering over the hills. To join David they had left their ancestral home on the farther side of Jordan, crossed that rapid dangerous river when it was in full flood, fought their way through the abettors of Saul on either side of the river, "putting to flight the valleys" (*i.e.* the inhabitants of the valleys) "both on the east and on the west" of the stream. Of men who had performed such a feat the chronicler says, "the least of them could stand against a hundred, and the strongest against a thousand;" just as we, in our more moderate Western speech, used to brag that one Englishman could beat three Frenchmen.

In the Third Muster-Roll (vv. 16—18) we are told of other men of Benjamin who, with some of the sons of Judah, repaired about this same time to David at Adullam. Their names are not recorded, but the chronicler or annotator seems to have been much impressed by a brief dramatic scene which occurred at their reception into David's camp. The tribes of Benjamin and Judah were the two tribes most faithful to the House of Saul. When, therefore, David's sentinels and outposts sent him word that a band of the children of Benjamin and Judah were approaching the camp, the suspicion occurred to David that they might be joining him only to betray him to Saul. With his native fearlessness he went out to meet them and judge for himself. He said, "If ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, you and I shall be of one heart; but if ye come to betray me to mine

enemies, although there is no wrong in my hands, the Lord behold and punish." Amasai, the chief captain of the band, thus solemnly greeted, was seized with one of those sudden impulses which the devout Hebrews recognized as an inspiration from heaven. "The Spirit came upon him, and he exclaimed,

Thine are we, O David !
And on *thy* side, thou son of Jesse !
Peace, peace be unto thee ;
And peace to every one that helpeth thee :
For thy God helpeth thee.

Surely, a very singular scene to take place at the gate of an entrenched camp, and not without a certain interest and pathos even for us !

In the Fourth Muster-Roll (vv. 19—21) we have the names of seven captains of the tribes of Manasseh, who "fell to David" at a much later period, when, after his exile in Gath, he had returned to Ziklag, only a few days before the defeat and death of Saul. All we are told of them is that "they were mighty men of valour," and that they helped David to chastise the marauding Amalekites who had plundered his camp. But the chronicler appends a note, very brief but very graphic, which tells us why David had been sent away from the Philistine court of Gath before the Philistine army joined battle with the army of Israel. The King of Gath loved David, but the lords of his court refused to trust him. They said, after due deliberation, "*For our heads* he will fall away to his master Saul"—*i.e.* he will betray us, he will give up our heads, to make his peace with his former king.

The Fifth Muster-Roll (vv. 23—40) contains a list of the captains and soldiers who had rallied round David at Hebron to make him king in place of Saul ; nor does it yield

in historic interest to any of the lists that have gone before it. In some cases it gives only the numbers from each of the tribes who had espoused the cause of David, though now and then it mentions the name of some illustrious captain or prince. But besides giving the numbers from each tribe, it often briefly characterizes them. Thus the twenty thousand eight hundred men of Ephraim are characterized not only as "mighty men of valour," but as having already acquired "fame" by previous exploits. The two hundred captains of Issachar are described as men "who had understanding of the times so that they could see what Israel ought to do"—men, *i.e.* of fine political sagacity; "and all their brethren acted according to their mouth"—*i.e.* took the advice of these skilful statesmen. The fifty thousand of Zebulun are described as "expert in war, and in the use of all weapons of war," as men "who could keep rank, because they were not of a heart and a heart." Most of the tribes have some brief characterization of this kind. But when the chronicler sums up, he says of the whole three hundred thousand what he had already said of the fifty thousand of Zebulun: "All these men of war, *that could keep rank*, came *with a perfect heart* to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel." No wonder that they succeeded in their aim. Three hundred thousand men who knew how to keep rank, and were of a single heart, might still overturn a kingdom, if not overrun the world.

Now, I have no apology to make for calling your attention to these ancient military lists, for I have no sympathy with those who think any part of Holy Scripture unworthy of study. With St. Paul, I hold "all Scripture" inspired of God, to be profitable for men. Our time has been well spent if we have only learned to read this Chapter, this Scripture, more intelligently. And this morning of all

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mornings it surely cannot be inappropriate to talk of camps and muster-rolls, and to learn that even these things are not uncared for by the God who sent his Son to save the world. If *He* cares for them, are not we to care for them too? If it was his Spirit that moved holy men to insert these antique military documents in the Sacred Chronicle, we surely may be moved by the same Spirit to inquire what they mean.

And yet I should be sorry to close without speaking a little more directly both to your consciences and to the present occasion. It is much to know what a wonderful book the Bible is, how every part of it is full of interest and instruction; but it is far more to feel that the truths of the Bible lay hold of every phase and department of our life, that what we do in *anything* we may do as unto the Lord, and not merely unto men. Let me, therefore, before I close, say a few words to my special audience of this morning, speaking to you, first, as to Volunteers, and then as to Men.

Now, *as volunteers*, when you hear of fifty thousand men "who could *keep rank*," that may seem to you no very wonderful achievement. You may think that it would be very strange if soldiers could not at least *march*. All I can say on that point is, that I have seen some volunteer and a good many line regiments at the march-past on parade, whose notion of a right line must have been a little eccentric if they thought they were keeping one, and who certainly presented a somewhat wavering and uncertain front. I don't know much about it, but I don't *think* it becomes any young soldier to be too sure that he can even march—so sure, at least, as to neglect his drill. But of course the sacred chronicler means much more than marching on parade when he says that the men of Zebulun "could keep rank." He means that they could keep rank amid the storm of battle, that they could repel a charge, or advance to the assault with

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unimpaired order ; that they could close up when comrades fell fast, and present an unbroken and undaunted front to all the perils whether of triumph or defeat, not breaking into wild pursuit in the hour of victory, nor dissolving into a mere rabble when the day went against them. And to keep rank in that fashion is to be a soldier indeed.

If you ask him what was the secret of this all-enduring order and courage, his reply hits the great secret of unity, organization and success. They could keep an unbroken rank under all temptations and disasters, *because "they were not of a heart and a heart ;"* because they were animated by a single over-mastering purpose, by an entire and perfect devotion. In each man, as in the whole army, there was a single and supreme aim. They did not think of safety *and* victory, but of victory alone. They had not one heart in the field and another heart craving for home and ease. They were "*all there*," breathing a purpose which absorbed all passions and affections of the soul. They did not doubt that God had chosen David for their king. They did not regret that David had been chosen rather than another. They were bent, with a whole heart, an undivided will, on forcing a passage for him to the throne. They had no by-ends to serve. They were not thinking of personal ease, or plunder, or fame. In the enthusiasm of the time they forgot themselves, and were willing to sacrifice themselves to secure the end they had set before them. It was this singleness of heart, this oneness of purpose, this entire devotion to what they held to be God's will and made their own will, in virtue of which they could keep rank even when menaced by danger and death on every hand.

And it is this unity of heart, this singleness of motive and purpose, which is still the secret of order and victory. Almost any aim—any enthusiasm—however base in itself, if only it infect a whole race, or even a whole army, is the

surest omen of triumph. No savage tribe ever worshipped an idol or fetish more hideous and despicable than that "glory," that mere lust of conquest and domination, which has made the French the pest of Europe for the last two or three centuries ; and yet, when it has inflamed men with its full rage, and there is a Napoleon to command and lead them, what marvels has it accomplished ! And if a motive so base, an enthusiasm so selfish and vainglorious, can inspire men with an indomitable courage and fortitude ; if it can nerve them to endure all hardness and to die in a rapture—what may we not expect if the fire be from heaven, not from hell ? if the enthusiasm which unites the heart be an enthusiasm for a righteous cause ? When men feel, as the servants and soldiers of David felt, that they are putting their lives in jeopardy for their country and their God ; when they know they are pursuing no low, no personal aim, not serving for hire, nor seeking the bubble reputation in the cannon's mouth ; when their motto is, "Defence, not defiance," and they serve for patriotism, not for fame, for love and not for lucre : then, surely, we may expect of them a patient heroism, an undaunted courage, before which those who are moved by lower aims will fall, as of old time the Cavaliers fell before the Puritans, as in these days the French have gone down before the Germans.

I do not say this as flattering you on what you are, but as warning you of what you ought to be. It is to be feared that in every Volunteer Corps there will be some who join because they like to sport an uniform, because they take kindly to athletic exercises, because they are fond of shooting, or for some other reason as personal and as inadequate as these. But the volunteers of Christian England *ought* to be men *who can keep rank, because they are not of a heart and a heart*, because they are animated by a single supreme purpose ; because, in devoting themselves to the service and

defence of their country, they believe they are doing the will of God. Any motive short of this is only too likely to fail you in the day of trial, if that day should ever come ; but, standing on this, you are on a rock that can never be shaken ; for if it be your supreme aim to do the will of God, you can always be doing that will whether in life or in death.

And now, last of all, a few words to you *as to men*. The secret of unity in our individual lives is one with the secret of unity in a camp or an army. We bring order and peace into our lives as we cease to be of a heart *and* a heart, as we become of one heart, and a perfect heart before God. If you consider what is the cause of most of the calamities and miseries of men, you will find that it lies in their being drawn in different directions by contrary and warring desires. A man loves wealth, for instance, and would fain have it ; but he also loves pleasure, and in seeking the one, often loses the other. Or a man loves distinction, but he also loves ease ; and even to win fame he will not give himself with entire devotion to study and endeavour. Or a man loves duty, really wants to do what is right ; but he is very open to this temptation or that ; and so he is for ever wounding and blunting his conscience and missing his mark. Or a man sincerely loves God, but still more sincerely he loves himself, and can never quite give up his own will to the Divine will, or let charity altogether conquer the selfishness native to him. And thus it comes to pass, that being of a heart *and* a heart, having one heart tending toward heaven and another heart pulling us down to earth, we swing from change to change, and pass from sorrow to sorrow, and never enter into a constant and settled peace. How should we be at peace until we have but one heart in our breast, and that heart have a supreme aim and affection to which we subordinate all else ? And as we are immortal, and must live on when the earth and all

that it holds fades from our sight, how can we know peace, or hope to know it, until our supreme good be as immortal as ourselves, until our affections are fixed on Him who inhabits eternity?

Think how weak we are, how helpless, even though we be young and strong! We stand at the mercy of a thousand accidents which we cannot avert; we crave a thousand objects which we cannot reach; we are thrown from hope to fear, from sorrow to joy, by forces over which we have no control; our hearts are for ever seeking rest, yet finding none. And yet all the while there lies a good close to our hands better than all earthly good, a peace which passeth all understanding. For if we loved Him who is best worthy of our love, should we not love God? If we were wise, and looked before us, and resolved to do what would be best for us now and hereafter, in eternity as well as in time, should we not try, above all things, to make God's will our will, and to secure Him for our friend? Let us but love Him and make it our chief aim to make his will our will, and nothing can any more harm, nothing disturb us. For his will *must* be done, and is done, both in heaven and on earth; and if his will be ours, our will must be done too. *Then*, it will not be worth while for us to break rank, to violate the true order of our lives, in order to escape danger or death; for what can danger do save bring our Father to our help? and what death, save take us home to Him? We shall then be of the thousands who know how to keep rank, because we are no longer of a heart and a heart.

X.

The Last Words of David.

2 SAMUEL xxiii. 1—7.

“THERE is nothing,” says Montaigne, “of which I am so inquisitive as the manner of men’s deaths, their dying words, looks, deportment ; nor is there any passage of history which takes up so much of my attention. Were I a writer of books, I would compile a register of the various deaths of people, with notes which would instruct me both how to live and how to die.” If we cannot go the full length of the French essayist and say, “There is *nothing* of which we are so inquisitive,” yet most of us are inquisitive as to the manner in which men die ; we like to hear the last words which fall from their lips. For we know that death often throws a new light on life—a light in which many of our judgments are modified or even reversed, so that what we had hitherto put last takes the first place and what we had held to be first retires into the last place in our thoughts and desires. We know, too, that when men die, as they often change and correct their judgments of the past, so also they often see the future more clearly, and speak to us of the great spiritual realities in a higher than their accustomed strain. And as it is of inexpressible moment to us rightly to apprehend both the life that now is and that which is to come, we are glad to hear their last words, to ponder them, to follow out any

clue or suggestion which may help us to think more accurately of ourselves, of our duties, and of the prospects which lie before us.

Moreover,

“The tongues of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony,”

since

“Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,
For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.
He that must say no more, is listen'd more
Than they whom youth and ease have taught to gloze ;
More are men's ends marked than their lives before :
The setting sun, and music at the close,
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last—
Writ in remembrance more than things long past.”

But if we like to hear the last words of most men, if even “the last dying speech and confession” of a criminal has a certain impressive interest for us, there is a special reason why we should study the last words of the wise Hebrews whom we meet in the Old Testament Scriptures. We have a special interest in *their* words, not simply because they were great men, and good, and wise, nor even simply because they were men who had known the inspiration of the Almighty ; but because, as they lay a-dying, they were often raised above even *their* wont : because they were then the subjects of a singular exaltation in which they penetrated more deeply than ever into the councils of God, read the meaning of past history more clearly, and more clearly foresaw what form and pressure the future would take from the past. Jacob and Joseph are familiar instances of this high dying mood. As he was dying, Jacob read the events of his past life in a new light, and his children's characters, and was able to discern what *God's* meaning was in the events by which he had been tried and trained,

what his sons were like in heart and spirit, and to what destinies their peculiarities of character would infallibly conduct them.* As Joseph "lay a-dying" he had a still larger vision. He saw and foresaw not only what special features the changes of life would develop in the characters of his sons, and what fate awaited them, but also what God had begun to do for the nation, what was the significance, what would be the issue, of the providences which had befallen them; how surely God would visit them, redeem them from bondage, redeem them *through* bondage, and lead them to the land promised to their fathers. His spirit passed in a triumph, for the vision was clear; and, looking forward through the years, he saw the thousands of Israel marching through the wilderness and carrying with them his unburied bones, to lay them with the dust of his fathers.†

David's last words are less familiar to us, but not less valuable—not less, but more. For if Jacob, when he died, foresaw the fate of a family, and Joseph the fate of a nation, David saw, and rejoiced to see, the destiny of mankind. His dying eyes were fixed on that great Advent which changed the old world into the new world in which we live, on the dawn of that new Christian day which has come to the earth like the clear *shining* of the sun *after rain*, and clothed it in fresh *tender green*.

One reason why David's last words are less familiar to us than those of some of his fathers is, probably, that the translation of them in our Authorised Version is so inaccurate and misleading. Our translators, however, are not much to blame for that. David's words are very brief, abrupt, enigmatical; the verbs and connecting particles are often omitted: and nothing but that larger knowledge of Hebrew with which in these days God has rewarded the

* Genesis xlviii and xlix.

† Genesis l. 24, 25.

studies of devout men would enable us to translate and interpret them. Whether it was so designed or not we cannot tell, but, in the Sacred Record, the last words of David fall brokenly from his lips, as though uttered with difficulty and pain. They sound like the murmurs of a dying man struggling for breath, who nevertheless has somewhat of the utmost moment to say, and nerves himself to gasp out the more weighty words and phrases, leaving his hearers to piece them together and to spell out their meaning.

I give in a note the best translation of these "last words" I can frame,* but no translation will convey their significance ; they must be interpreted and explained. For the sake of order and convenience we may divide them into a

- 1. Now these be the last words of David.

The oracle of David, the son of Jesse :
The oracle of the man, the highly exalted,
Of the Anointed of the God of Jacob,
Of the lovely one in Israel's psalms.

- 2. The Spirit of Jehovah speaks within me,
And his word is on my tongue,

3. The God of Israel saith,
The Rock of Israel saith to me :—
A Ruler over men, just,
A Ruler in the fear of God.

- 4. And as light of the morning when the Sun rises,
As a morning without clouds :
From shining after rain tender green (springeth) out of the earth.

- 5 For is not my house thus with God ?
For He hath made an everlasting covenant with me,
Equipped with all (things), and attested ;
For all my salvation, and all (his) good pleasure,
Should He then not cause it to spring forth ?

- 6. But the wicked,—as rejected thorns are they all,
Which men do not grasp with the hand,

- 7. But whosoever toucheth them
Equippeth himself with iron and spear-shaft,
And they are utterly burned with fire where they stand.

Prelude and a Revelation. The Prelude extends to the middle of ver. 3 ; the Revelation, beginning there, extends to the close of ver. 7. Taken together, they shew how David read the secret of his past life, what he thought its supreme meaning was ; how it was related to the history of Israel and of the world ; what hope there was in it for the Hebrews and for all men ; what light it threw on the future destiny of the human race.

I. THE PRELUDE. By their very form the opening words of the Prelude point back to an antique prophecy, the prophecy of Balaam on the fate and glory of Israel (Numbers xxiv. 3, 4.) If we compare the two, we shall at once discover their resemblance and their contrast.

Oracle of Balaam, the son of Beor ;
Oracle of the man with closed eye ;
Oracle of the hearer of Divine words,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Falling down, and with opened eyes.

Thus Balaam introduced his prophecy. David introduces his prophecy with the words—

Oracle of David, the son of Jesse ;
Oracle of the man, the highly exalted,
Of the Anointed of the God of Jacob,
Of the lovely one in Israel's psalms.

The correspondence is close and obvious ; it is impossible to doubt that Balaam's "oracle" suggested at least the form of David's "oracle." But why did David adopt this antique form ? why fall back on the prophecy of the Seer of Pethor concerning the destiny of Israel ? Clearly, in order to intimate, by his very first words, that he also was about to speak of the destiny of Israel, that he was about to take up Balaam's theme, to carry on his prophecy

of the Star and the Sceptre and the Ruler who should come out of Jacob. Once more that ancient "oracle" is about to open its lips, to announce the issues of the national life. It is no mere deduction of human reason to which we are about to listen, but an inspiration from the Almighty who from of old has revealed His counsels to men: it is no family or personal interest with which the dying king is about to deal, but the supreme interest and hope of the elect race.

Hence, in ver. 2, he affirms—

*The Spirit of Jehovah speaks within me,
And his word is on my tongue.*

Not always, nor ordinarily, a prophet, David feels that he is a prophet now, that he has escaped the limits of time and sense, that he sees things as they are and as they will be; and that he is moved by the Divine Spirit to utter what he sees. Commonly, when the Spirit came on him, it moved him to give lyrical expression to Divine laws and promises which were as familiar to every true Israelite as to himself, to turn God's statutes into songs. But now he is not simply a psalmist; a deeper mightier inspiration shakes him; he is as the priest, waiting with ineffable longings in the inner shrine of the sanctuary, to whom a God reveals Himself and utters words big with fate. All the epithets he employs confirm this thought. His oracle is more than the oracle "of David, the son of Jesse," of the "anointed" king, of the sweet psalmist. He is not only a man, but a man whom God has "highly exalted;" not only a king, but "the Anointed of the God of *Jacob*;" not only a psalmist, but the singer of "*Israel's* psalms." It is not only he who speaks, but "the Spirit of *Jehovah*," "the God of *Israel*," and "the Rock of *Israel*." These national and sacred names are thus perpetually introduced, these changes are

rung on them, to forewarn us that we are to hear the voice of God rather than the words of man, and that the Oracle is about to speak on no personal theme, but on a national theme, on that one great theme which lay at the very heart of Israel's life and hope,—the Advent of the true King of men, the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

But if, in the Prelude, David's oracle corresponds to Balaam's, it also *contrasts* with it; and, doubtless, the contrast is designed to suggest that the son of Jesse is about to speak more definitely, more fully, than the son of Beor, to teach us what the elder prophet did not know. Balaam was an alien; he was "a man of God who was disobedient to the word of the Lord." The eyes of his spirit were for the most part closed; it was only in an occasional vision that they were opened. The vision threw him into a trance, into an ecstasy: it came upon him like an armed man, and felled him to the earth. He had no clear knowledge of what he saw; he saw a good which he was not to share. But David is no alien; he is an Israelite indeed, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah. He has kept the statutes of the Lord. He is familiar with visions and voices from heaven. He is "the man" who has been "highly exalted," in that God has both anointed him king and gladdened his heart with the tender music of "lovely" psalms. He is to share the good he foresees; the blessing for Israel and for the human race is for ever associated with the covenant God has made with David and his house. Preferred so far before Balaam, lifted so high above him, chosen and called and blessed as man, as king, as psalmist, when *he* speaks of the hope of Israel, he will sound a higher strain than an alien from the commonwealth of Israel and a traitor to Jehovah. *His* vision will be no cloudy and imperfect glimpse of a Star and a Sceptre; he will see *the King*, the

true King of men, and the new day which the King will make for men.

This, then, is the Prelude in "the last words of David." May we not hope much from a commencement so lofty, so benign? Must he not, after exciting expectation with these solemn, mysterious, yearning chords, strike on a theme which will fill and satisfy the ear? A preface so stately and sublime demands a large and noble utterance.

II. Let us, then, proceed to THE REVELATION, and mark how grandly our utmost expectations are fulfilled.

What is it that David sees in the future as his eyes grow large and clear with the inspiration of the Almighty? He sees

A Ruler over men, just,
A Ruler in the fear of God.

That is to say, he foresees that in due time the ideal Ruler, the true divine King, will arise on the earth, who will be of a perfect justice, because he rules in the fear of God. It is the King for whose advent the earth groans and travails; the King whom men have been trying to find in all their political schemes and revolutions; a King of a perfect equity, meting out to men of every condition the due reward of their deeds, attempering his justice with mercy because He fears God. It is the King of whom in after ages the prophets prophesied—

Behold the days come, saith the Lord,
That I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch;
A King shall reign and prosper,
And shall execute judgment and justice in the earth:
And this is the Name by which He shall be called,
Jehovah our Righteousness.

It is the King of whose advent seers and sages dreamed

in hope, believing that men, so miserable under the unjust rulers who consumed them, would be lifted by his coming into ecstasies of joy and praise ; that they would "rejoice greatly and shout for joy," because their true King had come to them at last, "righteous and having salvation." It is the King who in his lowliness rode into Jerusalem on an ass, welcomed by the hosannahs of little children ; who went meekly to the Cross, and tasted death for every man, that He might redeem us unto life eternal. It is the King who will come again, in the glory of his Father, to repeat in power all that He once wrought in meekness, to establish his kingdom on the earth, and to gather into it the nations of the saved. This is the King whom king David saw when death lifted the crown from his weary head,—Christ, the ideal Ruler, the sole, true, and perfect King of men.

As he looked steadfastly into the future, this tender yet august Figure rose before him ; and as he contemplated it he saw—oh, with what thankful wonder and surprise!—a kingdom which surpassed all earthly kingdoms by as much as "the Just One," the ideal Ruler, is fairer than the sons of men. One cannot but be touched by the sweet pure figures in which the kingdom of Christ passed before the mind of David. Think what the kings he knew were like—the kings of Egypt, Assyria, Philistia ; what Saul was like ; nay, even what David's own reign had been like. What tyranny and mutiny, what wars, famines, exactions, revolts had he known in these rulers and their realms ! With what surprise and delight, then, must he have beheld a King whose reign was to be the reign of gentleness and fostering love ; a just King, and yet a King whose influence should be "*as the light of the morning when the sun rises,*" of "*a morning without clouds,*" of a morning that, coming and *shining after rain,*" would bring a fervent gracious heat, beneath which the earth would clothe itself in robes of fresh and "*tender*

green" (ver. 4). David had often seen the fields smitten into barrenness by the fierce heat of an Oriental sun; he had heard the rushing showers of the heavy Eastern rains, and when the morning broke without clouds and the sun shone on the saturated earth, he had seen the barren plains turn green in a day, the tender grass springing up as at the touch of an enchanter's wand, and the lilies of the field clothing the grass as with the robes of a king and loading the air with fragrance. And it was under this figure that he conceived the Messianic reign. When the true King came, the darkness in which men sat would be over and gone; the rain of tears, falling for ever because of the tyranny of man to man, would cease. The Sun would rise with healing on his wings. A new happy day would be born out of the eternity of God. All that was pure, and lovely, and sweet in human character and life would spring to meet it, and rise into new, fairer, and more fruitful forms.

Alas! that the King should have come, and that the kingdom should even yet be so far off! Alas! that David's hope should still be a hope to us, and little more! Yet let us cherish this hope. It will be fulfilled. When our hearts are sad and weary, let us patiently look forward to the day yet to dawn, the morning without clouds, whose sun, shining after our tears, will draw forth all the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

But what guarantee have we, what guarantee had David, that this hope will ever be fulfilled? David's hope was based on a "covenant" (ver. 5). As from afar he beholds the days of the Son of Man on the earth, he triumphantly demands—

For is not my house thus with God?

that is, "Does not my house stand in such a relation to God that the righteous Ruler will spring from it?" And he

answers his question by appealing to an "everlasting covenant" which God had made with him :

For He hath made an everlasting covenant with me,
Equipped with all (things) and attested ;
For all my salvation and all (his) good pleasure,
Should He not then cause it to spring forth ?

Now this "covenant" points back to the earliest years of his reign. No sooner had he sat down on the throne, and got rest from his enemies round about, than he determined to build a house for God. The prophet Nathan brings him the word of the Lord. David is not to build the house ; that honour is reserved for his son. Yet because he had thought to build a house for God, God will make *him* a house. Again and again the prophet assures the king that *his* throne, his kingdom, shall be established for ever.* This promise David calls "a covenant," a contract, because he understood that, on the one hand, he and his seed were pledged to build a house for God, and that, on the other hand, God would found a permanent house for him and his seed. This covenant, often in his thoughts through life, was still in his thoughts as he died. But his thoughts have grown and broadened as he has brooded over the promise, until now, at last, he sees its full scope. God has promised that his seed, his kingdom, shall endure for ever. But the universal and eternal kingdom cannot be a merely Hebrew kingdom ; the true ideal King cannot be merely a Hebrew sovereign. The true King, absolutely just, ruling always in the fear of God, must be that Messiah of whom all the fathers had spoken, whose day even father Abraham saw afar off and was glad ; *His* kingdom must include all the nations. God's promise to him (David) cannot be broken ; in some form, the King must come ; at some time,

* 2 Samuel vii. 11—16.

the kingdom must be set up. If his seed are to produce the Divine King and to possess the eternal kingdom, the Messiah must be of his seed. No jot, no tittle of God's word can fail. On his word, his promise, his covenant, the dying king bases his hope for his house and for the world; he is sure that the Christ will come, and with Him the universal reign of justice, and peace, and love.

Have we no similar, no superior, guarantee? Assuredly, we need it. For David's Son and Lord has come, but men received Him not. The light has shone into the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not. The new "day" has dawned, but the rain is not over yet: the clouds are not gone; they still darken our heaven: the earth is not yet covered with "tender green." And as we consider under what tyrannies men still groan, how much misery and pain and dreadful rage of revolt still tortures their hearts, we find it difficult even to hope that the true King will yet reign over all; that the darkness will be utterly swept away before the incoming light; that a tender Divine Hand will wipe away all tears from all eyes; that even the desert will gladden into verdure, and the wilderness blossom and rejoice like the rose. When our hearts are thus sad and hopeless within us, what shall we do, what can we do, but trust in our "covenant," the covenant of God with the man Christ Jesus? Christ has offered Himself a sacrifice for us: and shall not God give Him to see of the travail of his soul? Christ has reared a house for God, in which myriads worship at this day: shall not God found a house for Christ that will endure for ever, and give Him a kingdom that cannot be moved?

David could rely on his covenant because it was "equipped with all things," because it provided for all events, even for "the falling away" of his seed: because God had assured him that, even if his seed should commit iniquity,

though He would chasten them, He would not take away his mercy from them. The covenant was "*attested*," made sure, by this gracious provision ; for if even the faithlessness of men could not annul the covenant, what could annul it ? *God* would never be faithless ; and therefore David was certain that God would cause "all the salvation " promised to his children to spring forth, that all the "good pleasure " of the Lord, as expressed in the covenant, would be accomplished. Is not *our* covenant, then, an everlasting covenant ? Has not God pledged Himself that the world shall be redeemed, that all flesh shall see his salvation ? Has He not assured us that the unfaithfulness of men shall not make his redeeming purpose of none effect ? that if the seed of Christ commit iniquity, though He will chasten them for their sins, He will never remove his mercy from them ? We too, then, have a covenant on which we may rely. It is equipped at all points, makes provision for all events. If our unfaithfulness cannot annul it, nothing can annul it ; for God is faithful who hath promised : He cannot change nor lie. It is on God's redeeming purpose and intention, on his eternal will for the salvation of all who can and will be saved, that we must stay our hearts when they are weak and sad. We cannot build our hopes on ourselves, on our fidelity, our loyalty, for we veer and change before every breath ; nor on our neighbours, for they are variable as we. But God sits on high, above all reach of change, carrying out the steadfast purpose of his love through the very vicissitudes which obscure Him from our sight and set us doubting whether for ourselves or others. Let us trust in Him. Let us rest in the love from which "neither death, nor even life," neither time, nor even change can in anywise separate us.

David, then, has seen the true King of men, and the benedictions which are to flow to men from his reign ; he has disclosed to us the sure basis, the everlasting covenant

on which he rests his hope in the advent of this King. But even yet the "oracle" is not complete. That it may be complete, it must also warn us of the judicial and condemnatory aspects of the Messianic reign. In what soft pastoral images does the Shepherd-King set forth the happy influence of the coming of the ideal Ruler! When *He* comes, there is to be a sunrise without clouds; after the long night of weeping, light and joy are to come with the morning; the earth is to robe itself in tender green. How peacefully the words flow on! what bright happy thoughts they suggest! But when Christ sets up his throne among men and opens the kingdom of heaven,—is there nothing in the scene to quicken sad thoughts and heavy forebodings? Yes; when Christ came in great humility there were many who received Him not. Now that He comes day by day, in his Word and Spirit, there are many who do not receive Him. And when He comes in great glory, there will still be some who will not have Him to reign over them. We do not pretend to know, we do not need to know, the exact nature of the doom which will fall on those who persist in rejecting Him. But we do know that their doom is dark and terrible, so dark and terrible that we should strain every nerve to save men from it.

Now, that David's "oracle" may be complete, he is permitted to see *this* aspect of the Divine kingdom also, and to set it forth in appropriate images. He still uses images drawn from pastoral life. But, now, we hear nothing of cloudless mornings and of suns that shine after rain. He now speaks to us of thorns which have been "rejected," that is, condemned to extirpation, that they may no longer suck the soil's fertility from wholesome and fruitful growths (ver. 7). When men clear the ground of these noxious thorns, he says, they "do not grasp" them "with the hand;" they put on "iron" gauntlets to pull them up with,

and beat them off with the heavy "spearshaft," and gather them together, and burn them in the very place in which they grew. The parable is homely enough, but how terrible! True, David was not a modern theologian, and probably did not conceive the future of the wicked as we conceive it. But he knew that to be wicked was to be miserable. He knew that if we reject God, God must reject us; that if we degenerate into worthless thorns which cumber the ground, we must give place to trees that bear good fruit. Do not we know it, too? Is it not reasonable and just—nay, is it not kind even to *us*—that if we are worth nothing, we should become nothing? that if we *will* injure our neighbours, we should be separated from them? Is it not right and just that the mercy which we despise should be withdrawn from us? that if we can only be safely touched with iron glove and spearshaft, we should be consumed from the land which we make barren?

These, then, are the scenes which passed before David as he lay a-dying; these are the scenes which pass before us as we listen to the "oracle" of the son of Jesse. First of all, there rose before him an image of the perfect Man, the ideal Ruler, with no iron sceptre in his hand, ruling over men not by force, but by justice, not for his own aggrandizement, but for their good; blending mercy with justice because He is animated by the fear of God. As the lines of that august yet gracious Form grow dim, there rises before him a vision of the earth drenched with fertilizing showers, rejoicing in the clear shining of a morning without clouds, and greeting the benignant rays with springing verdure and fragrant incense. Then, he remembers the day when he first sat in peace on the throne of Israel, resolving in his grateful heart that he would build a house for the God who had "highly exalted" him. What a humbling and bewildering pain it was to him to learn that this honour was

denied him ! that the blood on his hands, though its stains had been contracted in the service of God, unfitted him to build a temple for Jehovah ! And God, how tenderly He had turned sorrow into joy by choosing *that* moment to assure him that his own house should never fail, that the true King of men should be a branch from his stem, that the renovated earth and new heavenly day should be possessed by his seed ! And, last of all, there rises up before him a field overrun with thorns, which the Divine ministers pluck up with gauntleted hands, and beat down with their burnished spears, and commit to the consuming flames.

What a grand vision it is ! How wide its scope ! How much it suggests ! What a magnificent consummation of David's magnificent career ! What a divine close to that most human life ! The psalmist rises into the seer, the king into the father of the King of kings ; and David passes from us radiant with an excellent and surpassing glory, at his highest moment, in his loftiest mood, the heavenly and eternal splendour dawning on him as his eyes close on the pomps and vanities of earth. Let us give God thanks for his great happiness, and pray that we too may be happy in our death, although no "vision" be granted us, and no "oracle" fall from our lips, through our faith in Christ the King and our sure hope in the coming of his kingdom.

XI.

Little Children God's Stronghold for Troubled Men.

"Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hast Thou founded a stronghold, because of Thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger."—PSALM VIII. 2.

AN ancient and common interpretation of these words is,—That when David sang of very babes and sucklings as a stronghold founded by God against his enemies, he did not mean literal "babes and sucklings;" what he meant was, that God often uses men who, as compared with the adversaries of his faith and law, are weak as babes and sucklings, to quell and overcome all the strength of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In short, David's words are to be taken as a poetical expression of the familiar law, that God chooses weak things to overcome the strong, and foolish things to overcome the wise. This is the common and accepted interpretation of these words, and its most common illustration has been the victory of the primitive disciples—a few poor, weak, illiterate men—over all the wealth, learning, and power of the great Roman Empire. The interpretation is sanctioned by most of the doctors and fathers* of the Christian Church.

* This interpretation, so common in the Church, has never found favour in the Synagogue. The rabbis have a surprising love for

None the less, this common and received reading is demonstrably untenable. It sins against two of the plainest laws of interpretation. All sound Commentators admit that, when any words of Scripture can be taken literally, they ought to be taken literally; that when, by taking them as they stand, we can get good sense and sound morality out of them, we ought to take them as they stand, and not betake ourselves to spiritual, mystical, or figurative methods of handling them. It will be my main object to shew that, taken just as they are, in the most literal way, David's words yield very good sense and very sound morality; and that to put a figurative or spiritual meaning upon them would be, therefore, a sin against an accepted canon of interpretation.

But before I do that, let me briefly indicate how the common and received explanation of the passage sins against another law of interpretation. This second law is, That we ought to interpret scripture by scripture, to read any one passage by the light which other passages shed upon it,—a

children. They apply to children and schools all the Scripture verses that speak of flowers and gardens. The Talmud is full of stories which indicate their love of "the little ones." Here are two such stories, the latter of which shews in what sense the Jewish "masters" read David's words. "There was once a great drought, and the most pious men prayed and wept for rain, but none came. At length an insignificant-looking person prayed to Him who causes the winds to blow and the rains to fall; and instantly, the heavens covered themselves with clouds, and the rain fell. "Who are you," they cried, "whose prayers alone have prevailed?" And he answered, "*I am a teacher of little children.*" . . . "When God was about to give his law to the people, He asked them whom they would offer as their guarantees that they would keep it holy. And they said: 'Abraham.' God said: 'Abraham has sinned; Isaac, Jacob, Moses himself, they have all sinned: I cannot accept them.' Then they said: 'May *our children* be our witnesses, and our guarantees?' And God accepted them; even as it is written, 'From the mouth of the little babes has He founded his empire.'"

law so obviously good and wise that it needs no vindication. Mark only how it bears on the theme in hand. These very words of David are cited in St. Matthew's Gospel,* and cited in a way which is quite decisive as to their meaning. When, at the close of his public ministry, the Lord Jesus went into the Temple, little children, who had heard their fathers and mothers use the words only the day before, came round Him, crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to the Son of David!" Certain of the Pharisees were much displeased with them, and with Him for not silencing them. They said to Him, "Hearest thou not what these say?" meaning, "Why don't you stop this foolish outcry?" And the Lord Jesus replied, "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" These little children in the Temple were not weak foolish men, nor feeble illiterate saints. They were simply "little children." Yet our Lord applies David's words to them. He at least understood that when David spoke of "babes and sucklings," he *meant* "babes and sucklings." Here, then, we have a scripture by which to interpret David's scripture. We are bound to read his Psalm in the light which Matthew's Gospel throws upon it. And read in that light, it means that little children, real "babes and sucklings," such as we have all taken in our arms, are God's stronghold for troubled men. Commentators may have put or found another sense in the words. We may have understood them in another sense. But which of the Commentators is comparable with Christ? If He stood alone, opposed to the scholars and expositors of all ages, we must side with Him rather than with them, even though, to side with Him, we must give up a thought which has grown familiar to us.

It is in deference to his authority, then, that we take

* St. Matthew xxi. 16.

David literally, and understand him to affirm that little children are God's stronghold for men when they are hard pressed by the enemy and the avenger. But how?—how can children be a refuge for us from trouble and doubt and fear? What good sense, what good morality, is there in such a thought, such a figure of speech, as this? The fact that our Lord Jesus Christ confirms David's thought only makes us more anxious to know what it really is, and to recognize its ethical beauty and force.

I. It will help us to get at this thought, if, for a moment or two, we consider the general drift of the Psalm, and how that fits into our experience.

Now if we walk out on any clear night, our eyes are constantly drawn from earth to heaven. The calm pure splendour of the moon, the stars that cluster and droop from the blue dome above us, the pale ever-changing cloud-frescoes which the winds paint upon it, "take" our hearts with their beauty. If our walk lead us through field and wood and valley, we feel *the harmony* of earth and heaven. There are silence and loneliness and calm around us as well as above us; and through these God speaks with us, and sheds sensible influences of peace on our careful hearts. It is as though He, the Holy and Beautiful One, were all about us, displaying his glory to us in the heavens above and the earth beneath, calling us not to rest only, but to rejoice, in Him. And then no words rise more naturally to our lips than the familiar verse, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!" But should our walk take us through thronged and turbulent streets, we feel *the contrast* between earth and heaven. We turn from the noise and tumult of the town, from the foul jest and drunken oath and noisy song, from the rattle of wheels and the glare of lamps, to the pure white lustre of moon and stars which

makes our earthly lights gross and dim, to the order and purity of the heavenly host, to the silence which reigns on high. And now perhaps our thought is, "Lord, what is man that Thou shouldest remember him? or the son of man that Thou shouldest visit him?" Man seems too poor and gross and base a creature to live on an earth so fair and beneath a heaven so calm and bright, a blot on the beauty of the universe, a discord that jars upon its harmony.

Both these moods were known to David. As he stood on his palace-roof when the toils and cares of the day were over, as he looked out on the grandly-shaped hills that lay round about Jerusalem in peaceful repose, and then up to the calm bright splendours of an Oriental sky, *he* felt the harmony of earth with heaven, and rejoiced in the "excellent name" of Him by whom the heavens and the earth were made. As he looked down on the city, all dark with tangled shadows cast by the narrow lofty streets, and thought of the vice and crime and misery which haunted the shadows, he also felt the contrast of earth with heaven, and was amazed that God should care for men and send his light to disperse their darkness.

But David had the happy and serene temperament of the true poet. All the bright happy qualities of his nature were reinforced by an unwavering faith in the Divine goodness. And, therefore, he did not yield, and least of all on the night on which this Psalm went singing through his heart, to the sadness and despair which the contrast between earth and heaven often breeds in us. He is obstinately sanguine. He *will* hope both for himself and for his race. If there is a divine order and glory in the heavens, there is also, there must be, a divine order and beauty in human life. Man was not meant to be the base sinful creature he is. God made him but a little lower than the angels—nay, but a

little lower than Himself,* crowned him with glory and honour, put all things under his feet. God meant man to rule on earth as He Himself rules in heaven, as calmly, as purely, as happily; and David will not believe that the weakness of man is, in the end, to make God's purpose of none effect. If God's will and man's will are for the present, and in much, opposed, David is very sure that at last God's will must prevail. Man may degrade himself, but nevertheless God will exalt him. Man may pollute himself, but nevertheless God will purify him. The Divine purpose must be accomplished, the divine end must be reached. Earth will yet be a reflex of heaven, and man the very image of God.

How wonderfully David's dream was fulfilled, we all know. In due time there sprang from the stock of Jesse David's Son and Lord, a Man, a Son of Man, who came to redeem the earth from its bondage to vanity and corruption, to take away the sin of the whole human race, and to make his strength perfect in their weakness.

David did not, and could not foresee *that*. Still, even in his day, there was much to confirm his hope for humanity, and notably this: Fallen as man was, he had not altogether lost his dominion over the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea. This faculty of rule indicated a faculty of obedience. Man cannot be wholly out of harmony with God's laws so long as he can sway God's creatures to his will. Only as he obeys the laws of the universe can he turn them to account, and rule over any of the works of God's hands. He does to some extent rule over some of these works and make them serve him. He must therefore be obeying some of the divine laws. And as he can still obey some laws, he may learn to obey all, and so regain

* The fifth verse of the Psalm should be rendered,—“Thou didst make him but a little lower than *God*, and crownedst him with glory and honour.”

his primal dignity. Once "lord of himself," and man will be lord of all things.

This, or something like this, was one ground on which David based his hope for men, when his heart was troubled and dejected by the doubts which their sins had bred. If their disobedience to some divine laws filled him with despair, the despairing mood changed and rose into glad anticipation as he remembered their obedience to other laws. If he grew sad as he noted the vices and crimes into which they had fallen, he grew bright and joyful as he remembered that God had made them to possess and rule all things, and that their present imperfect rule over God's works bore witness to the Divine intention, and prophesied its ultimate fulfilment.

But it is not a little surprising, not a little pathetic, to observe where David goes for a second ground of hope. He goes to little children. In "babes and sucklings" he finds, he believes God meant him to find, "a stronghold;" a refuge from doubts, and misgivings, and fears; a fortress in which he will be safe from all the sad thoughts and questionings which at times perplex and darken his conception of the infinite excellence of God. *Men* may become "enemies" to God. Finding the world so much out of course with their aims and desires, they may oppose themselves to the scheme and order of the Divine Providence, and seek a futile "revenge" for their disappointments and defeats in traducing the wisdom or the goodness of Jehovah. But "babes and sucklings," these at least are content with the lot God has appointed them. *They* trust, and love, and are at peace. And therefore, when David's heart is chafed by the clamours of men, who first rebel against the divine laws, and then charge God with the miseries their rebellion has brought on them; or when evil and wavering thoughts arise within his heart because he himself has rebelled against the divine ordinances, he betakes himself to little children as to a strong-

hold in which he is safe against all assaults, in which his heart may regain its forfeited serenity and peace.

II. Already, then, we may see that David's words, taken in their most literal meaning, contain a thought which commends itself to our common sense. Let us now put his thought to a test which will at once prove it and bring it home to us. David was a poet; and it lends no slight confirmation to his thought about children that at least the poets have been true to it. To them the prayer is familiar—

“O may I be a child in heart,
Although a man in years.”

Thus, for instance, Wordsworth, in his sublime ode on “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” sings his delight in the innocence, the heavenliness, of babes and sucklings, his sorrow over its loss. Let us set the English poet to interpret the Hebrew psalmist:—

“Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory, do we come
From God, who is our home.
Heaven lies about us in *our infancy!*
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon *the growing boy*,
But he beholds the light and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy:
The youth who daily from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended:
At length *the man* perceives it die away
And fade into the common light of day.”

Is not that a lovely picture, and as true as it is lovely? Do we not thus pass from infancy to maturity, finding the splendour of life darken as we shift from babe to child, from boy

to youth, till to the man all the glowing visions of earlier days fade into the common light of day, in which it is well if we have just light enough for our task? Is not our life a pilgrimage from East to West, from the mounting splendours of sunrise to the gathering dusk of evening? Is it not our best hope that, as we near the West and the evening shades darken round us, we may behold the more spiritual but evanescent hues of sunset, and in them the promise of a coming day?

Here is another picture from the same poem. Wordsworth depicts the innocent sports of childhood, intending, of course, that we should contrast them with the toils and cares and grosser pleasures of after-life :—

“Behold the child among his blisses,
A six years’ darling of pigmy size !
See, where ’mid work of his own hand he lies
Fretted by sallies of his mother’s kisses,
With light upon him from his father’s eyes !
See at his feet some little plan or chart,
Some fragment of the dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly learned art ;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral :
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song :
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife :
But it will not be long
E’er this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little actor cons another part.”

As the poet broods on the simplicity and gaiety with which a child mimics the joys and sorrows, the toils and cares, of graver years, on his clear insight and quick response to truth and love, he breaks out into remonstrance with him on the eagerness with which he longs to exchange

these innocent delights for the labours and anxieties of manhood. Addressing the child whom but now he depicted, he exclaims :—

“Thou, whose exterior semblance does belie
 Thy soul's immensity ;
 Thou best philosopher who yet dost keep
 Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,
 That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep
 Haunted for ever by the Eternal Mind—
 Mighty prophet ! Seer blind !
 On whom those truths do rest
 Which we are toiling all our lives to find :

* * * *

Thou little child, yet glorious in thy might
 Of heaven-born freedom
 Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
 The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
 Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife ?
 Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
 And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
 Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.”

I have quoted so much of this ode, not only on the principle of setting a poet to interpret a poet, but also because I think that in Wordsworth's experience we have the most exact and perfect illustration of David's thought. To David little children were a stronghold when he was vexed and fretted by the discontents of men whose will was “incorrect to heaven.” And is it not obvious from every line of his ode that Wordsworth also found children a stronghold? He, like David, is perturbed as he contemplates the lives of men, their ignoble toils for unworthy ends, their base pleasures, the miseries they impose on themselves by their violation of divine laws. And when the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world oppresses him, and leads him to despair of men,—whither does *he* run for refuge and comfort? where does he look for proof of the

inherent greatness of humanity? where seek to rekindle his hope in the immortality of man? He too betakes himself to little children, to "babes and sucklings." In their comparative purity, in the heavenly sweetness they bring with them from God, their home; in their simplicity and obedience, their serenity and peace, their content and trust and love, he finds "intimations" of man's greatness, and of the greatness of his destiny. Of so divine an origin, must he not be capable of a divine strength, and purity, and blessedness? Is so fair a promise to be altogether belied? Is it possible that these fine capacities for faith, hope, love, joy, rest will be destroyed by contact with care and sin? Must they not, even when hidden from our eyes, be discernible by God, when beyond our reach, be recoverable by Him? If the child is father to the man, can manhood not only obscure, but obliterate, all the graces which childhood shews?

Thus the poet makes children a stronghold for his troubled wavering heart. And on such a point as this no man's opinion carries the weight of that of a poet; for a man is a poet in virtue of his clearer vision of truth, and not only for his more musical expression of it. The poet is *a seer*, one who sees farther than other men, who has a quicker and profounder insight into the facts and truths of human experience. And therefore what he tells us about childhood and its meaning is better worth our acceptance than the dicta of sage or commentator.

But if our hearts are sometimes disturbed in their trust of God by the sins of other men; if, because they are so weak and wicked, we waver in our hope for them, we are still oftener dejected and hopeless for ourselves, because *we* have proved so wicked and so weak. Is childhood a stronghold to us in this mood? Yes,—and even our own childhood. Let us hear another poet comment on David's thought, one of our own poets, though comparatively few of us know him, or

make much of him. In his "Retreat," Henry Vaughan takes up the very case I have supposed. He is sick and weary of himself. He can find little in himself to love, small ground for hope. And in this strait he recalls the happy years of his childhood, longs to regain their purity and peace, and finds some hope for himself in the memory of what he has been when he can find none in the contemplation of what he is.

"Happy those early days, when I
 Shined in my Angel infancy !
 Before I understood this place
 Appointed for my second race,
*Or taught my soul to fancy ought
 But a white celestial thought :*
 When yet I had not walked above
 A mile or two from my first Love,
 And looking back, at that short space,
 Could see a glimpse of His bright face :
 When on some gilded cloud or flower
 My gazing soul could dwell an hour,
*And in these weaker glories spy
 Some shadows of eternity :*
 Before I taught my tongue to wound
 My conscience with a sinful sound,
 Or had the black art to dispense
 A several sin to every sense,
*But felt all through this fleshly dress
 Bright shoots of everlastingness."*

As he recalls the innocence and happiness of that early time, he cries :—

"O how I long to travel back
 And tread again that ancient track !
 * * * *
 Some men a forward motion love,
 But I by backward steps would move ;
 And when this dust falls to the urn,
 In that state I came, return."

Here again one of the wisest and devoutest of men, like

David, like Wordsworth, found childhood a stronghold in which he was secure from besieging doubts and fears. The man sees little to love, to approve, to warrant hope, in himself; but as he remembers the child he was, he takes heart. *Then* white celestial thoughts were familiar guests with him: may he not learn to entertain them again? Then the face of God was lovely to him, and not far off: may not he, who could once see God, hope to see Him again? Then clouds and flowers, all divine works, were full of glories in which he espied shadows of eternity: may he not hope that eternal truths will once more become present facts to him? Then, when conscience was without a wound, and sensual delights were not sinful delights, through all the fleshly dress of his mortal body he felt bright quickening shoots of everlastingness: are these promises and hints of immortality never to be carried out? Thus the man takes refuge in the child, and meets the doubts bred by the halting obedience of his maturity with the hopes suggested by earlier happier years.

III. The poets are wiser than we; their experience of life is far more valuable than ours: and they, as we have seen, confirm David's thought. But does not our own experience confirm it also? Our experience may be less valuable than that of the great seers and singers, yet for us it may have a greater force of suasion. Let us, therefore, having listened to the verdict of abler judges, judge for ourselves whether David is right.

David says, or implies, that when the discontents and mutinies of men against the Divine Laws had disturbed his heart and lowered his hopes for humanity, he turned from men to babes and sucklings; and that he found in their trust and love, their content and peace, a stronghold from doubt and care. Abiding in this stronghold, he grew calm

and hopeful again, strong enough to overcome all the doubts and fears which intercourse with evil men had quickened within him. And he ranks this stronghold, the influence of children, with man's lordship over nature—declares the one fact to be just as valuable and hopeful as the other. Does our experience confirm his thought, and his estimate of its value? When *we* are fretted and perturbed by the weakness and evils that haunt our own nature; or when we contemplate the lives of men, their ignoble toils, their base pleasures, their rebellions and miseries,—where do we go for refuge and comfort? where do we look for proofs of man's inherent greatness, of his sublime destiny? If we betake ourselves to God, if we resolve that we *will* trust in his goodness, and the saving purpose of his goodness, despite our doubts, that we *will* believe that every cloud which veils his love itself is love, we do well. We also do well if we fall back on the native dignity of man; if we say, "God would not have made him so noble in reason, so infinite in faculty, nor have placed him over all the works of his hands, unless He had kind thoughts and high thoughts concerning him." But we shall still do well if, like David, we find, not only a refuge in God, but also a stronghold in babes and sucklings; if, after betaking ourselves to the Father in heaven, we also betake ourselves to the little ones whose angels do always behold our Father's face. In their innocence, their simplicity and obedience, their serenity and peace, we may find proofs of man's true greatness, hints of the happy future which awaits him; and our hearts are not so strong in hope that we can afford to neglect aught that feeds our hope. It is a fair and reasonable argument, as we have seen, to say, "If in his origin man be so pure and so divine, must he not be capable of a divine strength, and holiness, and blessedness? Is so fair a promise as may be read in the face of every smiling babe to be altogether and

for ever belied? If the child is father to the man,—can manhood not only obscure, but obliterate, all the graces which childhood shews?"

That is fair argument : but the best logic is so often contradicted by facts that we cannot trust argument alone. What says experience then? *your* experience? Have you not found in children a stronghold of the Lord? If you are so happy as to have, or to have had, little children about you, David's thought can hardly be quite strange to you. I appeal, not to mothers,—we all know what they would say,—but to you, husbands and fathers. You go home, sometimes, weary, dejected, out of heart. Your affairs have not gone well with you. Workmen have been lazy, wasteful, ungrateful ; customers have cheated you ; rivals have stolen a march on you : creditors have been urgent and threatening. You have seen so much of false pretence, or of undisguised selfishness, men who make a great show of religion have been so miserably untrue to their profession, that your spirit is sore and heavy within you. "It is a mad world," you say, "and a bad world. Men don't get their deserts. The good fail ; the wicked thrive." For the time you have lost your faith in men, your hope for them ; and you barely trust in God Himself, He seems so far off and so indifferent. You think that it is hardly worth your while to toil and deny yourself in order to serve them and please Him—hardly worth God's while to try to redeem them into righteousness, charity, and peace.

Now, if in that mood, you talk with men, you *may* get a little comfort from them ; and also you may not. They may be hard and unsympathetic ; and in that case you will be more angry or more dejected than before ; or they may accord you their cordial sympathy, and cap every story you tell them with similar stories, till you think worse of men than ever. But if you go into your nursery, if you go to

little children who know nothing of the wickedness of men, and of the care it breeds, you are sure of comfort. You cannot talk to them of what is in your heart, indeed ; but you can listen to their childish innocent prattle. Their pleasure at seeing you, their innocence, their simplicity and sincerity, their shouts, and sports, and embraces make another man of you ; or rather, and better still, they make a *child* of you. When you are with them, you actually find yourself talking the nonsense of your own childish time, with the old childish lisps and abbreviations and imitative sounds. You become a child with children—*i.e.*, you become frank, simple, cordial, kind. You forget your cares. Your dejection melts away. Your spirits rise. In short, you have found your “stronghold,” and can say, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God has given me strength—strength for endurance, strength for hope. There must be good in men, and good in store for men, each of whom came into the world a babe such as mine.” Even though you have never thought of them as a refuge, and as God’s refuge, for your perturbed and weary spirit, you have found them a refuge and a help. They have drawn you out of yourself—out of your frets, and doubts, and fears.

God does not give us all children of our own ; but there are children all about us, if we care to love them and take pleasure in them. And we have all *been* children ; and the memory of childhood—has not that often been a safeguard and a ground of hope ? Most of us have found it a true stronghold. When we have looked with saddened eyes on our own character and career, when our sense of defect and weakness has been keen, and we have seen little or nothing in ourselves on which to found the prospects of a happy future, we have perchance recalled those early days when God was near to us, and to live was a pleasure, when heavenly and peaceful thoughts were familiar to us, when

we believed all we were told and were quick to respond to every sign of love. And when we have thus turned from our present to our past selves, from the fact that heaven *was* about us in our infancy we have derived a hope that we might recover the child spirit and grow meet for heaven again. If we have not, it is because we have not learned what God meant childhood and children to be to us. Childhood is a prophecy of heaven; for do we not believe that all children who die go to heaven? Nay, childhood *is* in some sort a heaven; for to an unperverted child, faith, hope, love are not difficult; they are easy and natural. And therefore in every man there, at least, *has been* the capacity of leading a spiritual and heavenly life, the life of faith, and hope, and charity.

When we recall our childhood, what do we remember? Do we not remember that we were then far more quick than we are now to trust, to love, to believe? If we have changed for the worse, do we not regret the change? Do we not long to recover the simplicity, the sincerity, the confidence, the good-will of that better time? Do we not cry—

“And, O, for a man to arise in me,
That the man I am may cease to be!”

or pray—

“Lord, I would be a child in heart,
Although a man in years?”

If we do, that is the best proof that the heart of a little child is not altogether dead within us. If we do, we may yet find childhood our stronghold in a sense deeper and truer than any in which I have yet used the phrase. For the Lord Jesus, who said that children were in the kingdom of heaven, and that their angels stand nearest God, also bade *us* become as little children, that we may enter his kingdom. And He does not bid us do what we cannot do.

Nay, He Himself, the Fellow of the Lord of Hosts, became a little child that we, though hardened and aged by many sins, might be "born again" and become as little children in Him. If the mere memory of our own childhood quickens the longing in us to become children again, "to travel back and tread again that ancient track," it also assures us that we can keep his commandment. For so long as the heart yearns for purity, for obedience, for simple trust and love, these graces are not impossible to it. The heart that is *dead* does not yearn. The heart that is dead to goodness, to faith, to charity does not crave them. If *we* crave them, our very craving, so that it be strong and sincere, proves that we may have them. For God, with whom all things are possible, waits to renew us in the spirit of our minds, to cause it to turn again to the spirit of a little child. *He* is glad to have his children back, to have sinful hardened men grow little children again, and come and sit at his feet. Every desire we have for the child-spirit is kindled in us by Him. By these He is seeking to draw us to Himself, from whom we once came with the simplicity and beauty of childhood upon us, from whom therefore we may once more receive, if we wish it and He will give it, the simplicity and freshness of children. If we do wish it, He *will* give it: for He is our Father, and loves us, and longs for our return even more than we long to return to Him, our home.

IV. Still, we may admit David's thought to be a true thought, without adopting his estimate of its value, without granting it to be worthy of its place in this Psalm. And at first, indeed, there does seem a vast disproportion between David's two grounds of hope for the human race. One ground is man's sovereignty over the animate and inanimate creation; the other is the simplicity, the obedience, the ~~trust~~ and love of little children. But the more we reflect

on this second ground of hope, the more readily shall we acknowledge it to be large and solid and momentous as the first. For, consider: here are the generations of men, each growing hard, selfish, sordid, sceptical of virtue, indisposed to trust and believe and love. By the time that the men and women of any generation have been married a few years, they have had to endure much that it is bitter and painful to meet—many losses, many sorrows, many disappointments. The common cares of the household and the market absorb much of their energy and time and regard; the romance is beginning to fade out of their lives, and all the rich colours of hope and youth. Life lies before them grey and a little sad—a scene of toil for the most part, and too often of toil for merely selfish and worldly ends. And then—the little children come to them, with songs and mirth, with innocence, content, gaiety. They come to redeem their parents from their worldliness, to soften their hearts, to quicken tender thoughts in them, to make them unselfish, loving, kind. Think what human life would be but for children, if we had no “babes and sucklings” to love, to work for, to play with, to reprove our grossness with their innocence, our worldliness with their unworldliness. Would it be worth having? Would not all the sweetness and spirituality of it be gone? Why, half our mirth, and more than half the motives which ennoble and purify our toils, half our piety and more than half our love come to us through children! What sports and recreations should we have, to call us away from our drudgery, but for them? What kind thoughts, what tenderness, what good resolves, what laughter, what tears, do we not owe to them! What lessons of heavenly wisdom and goodness do we learn while teaching them! How often do we suppress an evil word or look lest we should injure them! How often do we think of God that we may speak to them of Him! how often pray that we may teach

them to pray, or because, more even than for ourselves, we desire God's blessing on them! With what force do the simplest words of supplication from their lips strike upon our hearts! With what a pure and sacred gladness are we filled as we see them take delight in acts of kindness and self-sacrifice!

It is the little children who save the world—save it from its worldliness, its selfishness, its hardness of heart. That God sent them in their innocence and simplicity to make us pure and simple—that He sends them generation after generation:—is not that, after all, quite as weighty and hopeful a fact as man's lordship over the beasts of the field, and the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea? Was not David right in regarding "babes and sucklings" as one of God's greatest gifts to the race, a gift full of divine promise and hope? Are they not a "stronghold" for our thoughts, our affections, our pious trust in God, when our hearts are fretted with cares and hardened with regrets? Are they not a stronghold for the world as well as for us? Let us thus regard them. Let us take them as *God's* stronghold, as designed by Him to be our strength in hours of misgiving and fear. And because He has given them to us, let us try to use them for the highest ends and to train them for the highest ends, seeking to foster them in all virtue and holiness. The better they are, the more they will speak to us of God and of his goodness. The more we learn of them and the more we grow like them, the more we shall be able to teach them, and to draw from them the strength and comfort God designed them to give.

XII.

“I will Guide thee with Mine Eye.”*

PSALM XXXII. 8.

IT would not be easy to overrate the worth of this Psalm. Its value has been recognized by spiritual men of all ages, and by inspired men. St. Paul quotes it more than once with an emphasis which shews at what high rate he valued it,—using its verses to express his thoughts and sanction them. Its value lies very much in the fact, that, while it records David’s personal experiences, and because it records them with the utmost simplicity and frankness, it expresses some of the cardinal and most common experiences of all godly men. It reflects his spiritual moods, reflects them so clearly that we see his inmost heart, and *seeing his, recognize our own*. For “as face answereth to face in the glass, so heart of man to heart of man.”

The stages of spiritual experience which it sets forth are not peculiar to one person, but belong to all who have entered on the life of the spirit. Nor are they peculiar to any period of spiritual development; they belong to every period. The consciousness of sin, and the penitent confession of sin, the sense of forgiveness, and a growing trust in the forgiving love of the loving Father;—these are not

* A sermon preached at a Communion Service held on the last night of a year.

stages of spiritual experience through which we pass, *passing through them and leaving them behind*. They perpetually repeat themselves. They are tabernacles which shift, we shifting with them, but never removing far from the sacred precincts. They are lines of our lot within which our whole spiritual being and history move, and *must* move so long as we "bear the image of the earthly," so long as we "bear about this body of sin and death." The coming in of the Gospel has not removed us beyond their limits, or emancipated us from their control. In respect of these, we are much where David was, having to "acknowledge sin," and to "confess transgression;" aspiring after the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin," though, and because, *he* would not hide it, "is covered;" rejoicing that the Divine "hiding-place" is still open, and running into it to find ourselves, like the grateful Psalmist, "compassed about with songs of deliverance."

Occupying his position, we need his hope; and we have it. To us, as to him, the voice of the Heavenly Majesty comes, saying, "I will instruct and teach thee in the way thou shalt go: *I will guide thee with mine eye*:" a most welcome, an altogether invaluable, promise. We who have not been able to walk with even and steady foot, who have tripped and stumbled even when walking in the right way, and who have so often wandered into crooked and deflected paths, are to have, not only the teaching and guidance of the all-wise Father, but the guidance and teaching *of his eye*. What that means, what of vigilance, protection, solicitous and directing love, our own experience will help us to understand.

1. We have many organs, but none so expressive as the eye; many languages, but none so eloquent as that of looks. Who among us has not read in some well-loved eye im-

perious command, imploring solicitation, melting reproach, benign approval? And who has not felt the language of at least *that* eye to possess a power beyond that of words, more significant, more winning, more irresistible? A look says more, and goes farther, than a word; and that, not simply because the eye is more frank and truthful than the tongue, but mainly because the delicate mystic utterances of the eye can only be interpreted by *affection*. We guide strangers by the directing finger, or the spoken word. We utter commands to those who are servants, but not friends. Even to these, we may employ the language of the eye. They may see it dilate in astonishment, fix into command, melt into pity, kindle into anger. But its more subtle speech,—the glances which find no comment in word or gesture, the minute contractions and dilations, the delicate play of light and shade, the rising and falling of an inward fire, which reveal the passing inward moods of the mind: it takes love to interpret these. Those who are parents will find no difficulty in apprehending what is meant by the guidance of the eye. You sit with your children round the hearth. Friends and strangers enter your circle. Even they can read some of your looks, more of them in proportion to their intimacy with the real man who sits inside the courteous host. But there will be many which they will not see; many which, seeing, they will not be at the pains to study; and many more which, with all their pains, they will interpret in some mistaken sense. Looks will pass from you to wife or child, in which *they* will read restraining admonition, covert criticism, appeals for aid to sustain or change the currents of conversation, passing disgust at the vulgarity, or conceit, or prosing of the speaker of the moment, or the quick effusion of warm approval at the utterance of some generous high-toned sentiment,—looks in short of subtle and infinite variety, which only the love

that quickens sympathy, and the sympathy which brings knowledge, can read aright. Nay, so significant and expressive is this language of the eye that, if you care to try the experiment, you may even *say* one thing to your child and *look* another; and he, reading the familiar symbols, interpreting them by the witchery of love, discerning which is the more imperative command, shall disobey your word to obey your look,—the voluble expressive tongue proving no match for the dumb yet more expressive eye.

When, therefore, our Heavenly Father promises to guide us his erring children with his eye, we are to understand that we *are* children, no longer servants, no longer merely friends, but children whom He dearly loves despite our errors; children whose love to Him, underlying all errors of thought and action, He recognises, and will enlarge: children who by virtue of our love are to be admitted to his more familiar and household thoughts, who are to discern and share the play of Divine emotions of which others see not even the outward signs, or, seeing, do not apprehend. We are to understand that his eye, the eye that never slumbers nor sleeps, will watch over us with more than parental solicitude, and kindle in our defence with fires of more than parental love and courage. We are to understand that *his heart will be in his eye*, so that if, from amid the sorrowful environments and perplexities of our earthly lot, we bend an upward look to Him, we shall find Him looking down on us with a strengthening compassion, a guiding wisdom, a redeeming love. We are to understand that in proportion as we love Him, we shall grow wise to interpret the guiding instructions of his eye, until at last He will not need to speak to us in words, much less coerce us with penalties of law, but only have to *look* the enlightening thought into our minds, the directing sanctifying influence into our hearts.

Of old time He spake to the people by Urim and Thum-

mim—the stones on the high priest's breastplate blazing with light or veiling their lustre, to indicate his will. *Our* Urim and Thummim is his eye. It still rests on the *heart*—the *priestly* heart—the heart sanctified by love and service, and it still gives the oracular response. We have only to look upward in simple, single-eyed and single-hearted faith, and the loving glance meets us, shining in approval, or clouding to warn us; in either case "instructing and teaching us in the way which we should go." The difficulty, if difficulty there be, lies not in obtaining the response—God's eye is always on us, and always beaming with the light of love; but in preparing our will and heart, in making them sensitive to receive the photograph of that scene of future duty which He would have us traverse, and seeing it, to traverse it. The Eye of Love is full of meanings; it is only that our imperfect love fails to look for them, or fails to interpret them. The Heavenly Oracle is always open, open to all: it is only the seeking worshipping heart that is wanting. No man ever yet, whatever his perplexities, freed himself from the bias of personal desire and the trammelling obliquities of social judgments, and then looked up in simple childlike appeal, without seeing the eye of God raying out guidance, and reading in the Divine glance, "This, *this* is the way, walk in it, and all shall be well with thee." It is our happiness, it is among the supreme privileges of the Christian lot, that God *thus* teaches us; that his eye shines over us, a guiding star, a beneficent and healing sun, observant of which, we, who have to travel the dusty and confused roads of this mortal life, may always learn whither He would have us go, and by what way.

2. The difficulty of obtaining and benefiting by this gentle Divine guidance lies, as I have said, with us, not with God; it springs from our wayward will, and weak capricious affec-

tions. Now the Psalmist suggests two reasons why we should seek to have the difficulty removed, two reasons why the guidance here promised us should suffice.

And, first, it should be sufficient for us as *rational* men. No creature, save only man, is capable of this Divine eyeservice. His capacity indicates his duty, his privilege. Because he *can* be guided by God's eye, he *should* be guided by it. All other creatures need coercion and restraint. They must be coerced into the service of man, and restrained after they are in his service. They cannot be led with a look, or held back by a glance. This obviously is the Psalmist's thought, when to the promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye," he adds, "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in by bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." The mule and the horse, destitute of rational faculty and moral sensibility, "having no understanding," cannot be guided by purely spiritual influences, still less by the most soft and subtle of these. But man, with a reason which may penetrate all mysteries, and a moral sense which may be refined till it yield to the gentlest impact and tremble beneath the most exquisite and delicate touch, should bend and turn at the mere glance of God, requiring none other restraint but a look. It is shameful and a disgrace to him, if, with his high and capable nature, he should need the rude handling and coarse control appropriate to the nature of beasts. They must have bit and bridle—the bridle to guide and the bit to hold them in; but for rational sensitive man the restraint and guidance of the eye should suffice—the pure eye shaming him from sin, the loving eye winning him to a holy obedience.

3. Then, too, not only as rational, but as *redeemed* men, the guiding invitation of the eye should suffice to rule us.

This guidance is promised to David, and through him to all who are in the like benediction with himself. It is promised to him and to them, not simply as men, but as penitents, as forgiven penitents, as penitents who have found refuge from their fears, and aid against their natural infirmities, in God ; as penitents who have broken through the perilous and distressful silence of conscious guilt, and are now in the Hiding-Place, compassed about with the songs of deliverance. These are men in whom there is a true spiritual life ; in whom, therefore, are the organs of spiritual perception and sensation. They have not only reason's far-seeing eye, but the farther-seeing eye of faith. They have, besides the natural susceptibilities of conscience, the wider, more subtle, more quickly and delicately apprehensive sympathies of love. Their sins have been forgiven, their fears hushed into composure ; their dangers are lessening in the distance ; they are in the Eternal Refuge ; they are clothed with the armour of righteousness, and over it the shining robes of joy : and by all the darknesses and perils they have escaped, by all the immunities and liberties for which they have exchanged them, they are *bound* to obey the lightest glance of the redeeming God.

4. But why speak of obligation ? If the Lord and Governor of men, in his infinite tenderness, lay aside bit and bridle ; if in place of the coercions and restraints of law, He seek to guide us by the admonitory and appealing glances of his love :—shall not we be tractable and content ? shall we not joy and rejoice in his grace ? True, He *has* claims upon us. Our reason is his breath ; our faith his gift ; our love the pale reflection of his own. He made us, and made us anew, forgiving our transgressions, healing our diseases, redeeming our life from destruction, crowning us with his loving-kindnesses, satisfying us with good things, renewing

in us the eagle strengths of an immortal youth. But shall we enforce Him to produce his *claims*, when all He asks of us is that we suffer Him to add yet another and a diviner benediction—to guide us with his eye, instead of ruling us with his rod—to instruct us with a look, in place of holding us in with bit and bridle? If there be any spark of reason in us, any tenderness of love; if our redemption has been not in word only, but in deed and in power, we shall take this guidance, not as an enforced claim, but as an undeserved heart-melting act of grace; we shall accept it, not as bending to the majesty of law, but as joyfully welcoming a boon. It will make us exceeding glad that our Father no longer engraves his will on tables of stone, against which we may be broken, but *looks* it into our hearts, that, his will becoming our will, our obedience may have all the grace and freedom of voluntary service.

5. *Our* opportunities of loving obedience are very great. The bit and bridle of Law are not imposed on us. The very spirit and genius of the Gospel may be defined as "a guiding by the eye:" our whole spiritual life is ruled and shaped by love. Our one all-absorbing all-including duty is "looking unto Jesus," that we may find Him looking on us, that we may catch, interpret, obey his glance. Yes, even in those matters which are most outward and formal—as, for instance, the order of public worship or of Christian fellowship,—we are taught not by rigid laws, but by looks, by hints, by subtle spiritual impulses and delicate intimations which come and go like the viewless wind. The New Testament contains no verbal law enjoining in set terms the observance of a Sabbath, or the duty of adding ourselves to the outward communion of the saints. If you wait for a stern indisputable enactment, you may wait for ever. But if you will be guided by the Divine eye, there are looks

and guidances enough. Gentle but most significant directions will look out upon you from the words and example of Christ, from the words and examples of those who had most of his spirit; subtle mystic impulses will come to you as you read from the ever-living ever-quickening Spirit who interprets the written Word to the heart: and these glances, these hints and impulses, will exert on you a far more persuasive and compelling influence than the letter of the sternest law. You will not so much as think of being bound; in the gladness of conscious freedom, you will rejoice to keep the holy day, and to enter into the holy fellowship.

6. I do not think I ought to close without reminding you that, if you will not be guided by God's eye, He *will* hold you in with bit and bridle. If, to use the expressive words of a certain Commentator, "you *will* be as beasts before Him, God will deal with you as beasts:" the cold sharp bit will be thrust between your teeth, and, haply, the lash not spared. The "small cords" once sold in the Temple were woven by the merciful Christ into a scourge with which He drave the godless profaning merchants from the sacred precinct. And your sins in the hand of Christ will become a scourge; your neglects of his grace and guidance will be so used by Him as to chasten and correct you. Be not afraid when the day of correction comes to you, as it comes to all. Neither despise the chastenings of the Lord, nor faint before them. Wisely taken, they are the beginnings of all good. It is better even for a horse to be tamed with bit and bridle, and bent to useful work, than to live a useless self-indulgent life, and at the last to rush off in wild stampede to unknown harms. And how much better is it for a man that he should have all needful corrections, and be won by them to a free and glad obedience, than that he should be left, unchas-

tened, to travel on to the great darkness? Let us welcome even bridle and bit, if these will prepare us to enter into the fruition of the promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye."

7. This comfortable Divine assurance, in common with all others, has a special force and sweetness at this season. It is well that, as the Old Year closes, and we sit as in the midnight darkness, we should hear the cheerful bells of promise ring in the coming day, the New Year. It is well that as we strain our ear to catch the remoter sounds, we should find the whole air clangorous with the merry peals in whose rich harmony all notes of sorrow, all discords of heart and life, are drowned. And if all promises are doubly welcome when they come to us as omens and harbingers of good in some new tract of time on which we are entering, surely *this* promise has a special comfort and assurance. Life is so complex, its course so obscure and involved; for us, the straight upward path of duty is so steep and wearisome; it is crossed and recrossed at every turn by so many curving crooked ways of error, which at least at the outset are green and inviting, that it is often hard for us to discern our path, or, discerning, to walk in it. Any promise of *guidance* is most welcome to the perplexed wayfarer on this road. Any promise of guidance is then, of all times, most welcome, when the wayfarer is just passing another way-side stone which marks one stage of the journey as accomplished, but also points to a new untrodden track which lies before him. Let us, tired storm-beaten wayfarers, as we enter on the opening paths of this New Year, listen to the glad bells of promise, and take to ourselves all the comfort and hope of the assurance, "*I will guide thee with mine eye!*"

XIII.

Cheerfulness.

PROVERBS, XVII. 22.

SOLOMON says "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." The proverb is complimentary to a profession not much accustomed to compliments. Most of us, when we are well, sneer a little at medical men, at the incompleteness of their science, the uncertainty and oppositions of their practice, and are disposed to doubt whether their medicine does much, or indeed any, good. But when we fall ill, how welcome they are! how we hang upon their lips!—"Where be our jibes now?"—and if besides potion and pill, leech and lancet, the doctor brings with him a cheerful sanguine heart, how doubly welcome he is! For indeed, the doctor is a medicine too, and often a better medicine than any he can prescribe. Merely to have talked over our symptoms with him, to have put ourselves into his hands, to have heard from the lips of one familiar with disease that there is no great harm done yet: this often is half our cure. Frequently the doctor has to prescribe very little else but himself; we take *him* instead of his physic, for five or ten minutes every day—his cheerful kindness acting both as sedative and stimulant—and are sensibly better every time he comes.

The doctor is often the best medicine, and does infinitely

more good than his drugs ; still, other medicines are also good if used with a good discretion. God has caused healing herbs to grow, and infused a medicinal virtue into waters and minerals, making provision, in his fatherly goodness, for our diseases before disease was known. And these remedies for ills the flesh is heir to, if applied with a judicious thrift, are effectual to recall departing health, and to increase strength to them that have no might, or little might. But the best tonic, the best medicine, is a cheerful heart. For, as the wise king elsewhere reminds us, "The spirit of a man can sustain" whatever "infirmities" may weaken his body, or diminish his fortune ; but "an infirm spirit," a weak hopeless heart, is more than any man can bear.

Medicines are either preventive or curative ; but prevention is better than cure. And a cheerful heart is both a preventive and a cure ; but it is better to take it in time. The wise economy which bids us by simple precautions avert pronounced forms of disease, also bids us avert the heavier depressions of sorrow by cultivating an equable and hopeful habit of mind.

Medicines, whether remedial or preventive, imply disease, and our liability to it ; and, in like manner, to prescribe cheerfulness is to imply that there are many causes of sadness and melancholy around us, and that we are likely to be infected by them. And, indeed, it is wonderful that we so seldom take the infection, or take it so lightly. There must be a surprisingly elastic recuperative energy in our hearts to hold them so stiffly up against the depressions of Fortune and Misfortune. For the world is full of travail ; tongue cannot utter it. External events go seldom to our mind. The cares of business, the strain on invention and endurance, the failure to produce what we conceive and aim at, the indolence and dishonesty of servants, or the injustice and prejudice of masters, the failure of correspondents and customers, the

fluctuation of trade demands and trade fashions, the ebb and flow of commercial currents, or worse, the seeming caprice with which at times they cut out new channels and run in new directions, forsaking places or classes which they once enriched : what an incalculable amount of laborious and depressing thought do even these few words represent ? Or, if we take the home-life, how full *that* is of heavy and sorrowful solitudes ! Husband and wife do not agree, the twain have not become one ; or, if she set herself to him “like perfect music unto noble words” and he to her like noble words to perfect music, the harmony of this supreme psalm of life is broken by the rude discordant hand of Death. A thousand cares and tender trembling anxieties attend the rearing and due education of children ; a thousand more gather round the task of placing and settling them in life : nor are their cares less to whom God denies the gift of children. If we do not have them, we fret and murmur because we are denied them ; and if we have them, how seldom do they quite answer to our hopes !

The farther we extend our view the more shadowed and doleful is the prospect. If we look, beyond home and business, only to the little section of the world with which we are familiar, how many waters of bitterness we may find *defertilizing* the soil and blighting all happy growths ! Think of the ignorance and vice shrouded in our courts and alleys and back streets ; an ignorance so dense as not to comprehend the light which rarely shines upon it ; a vice so complete as that, mistaking itself for virtue and conceiving of evil as good, it rises into a *profession*. Think of the widow vainly struggling for her children’s bread ; of the children afflicted with forms of hereditary disease, or proclivities to evil born of their father’s sins, with “defects of will and taints of blood ;” of the poor women overtaken, starved, beaten, and sometimes murdered by drunken brutes whom

they love through all ; of the poor men toiling, footsore and clemmed, from factory to factory and workshop to workshop, to find the honest labour to which surely they have some right, but which nevertheless evades their search ; of the poor sufferers of either sex who with a sweet unfaltering patience endure through long years extremes of pain which would drive us mad, and for whose relief no merciful Heaven interposes. As we think of these scenes, and others which these recall, even the most sanguine heart pauses, falters, and sheds tears which all but quench the lights of faith and hope.

Nor do matters mend if we look within, if we review the course and progress of our spiritual life. In the inner, as in the outer, world we come on the signs of failure, disappointment, defeat. Though we have striven against evil for years, we are not safe from it, or from any form of it ; though for years we have followed after good—and that with such an Example and such a Helper !—we have no such secure hold of it, or of any one of its gifts and graces, as to be quite sure either that we have it, or that if we have it, we shall never let it go. To many, perhaps to most of us, it seems as though we stood very much where we did when we first started in our quest of life ; as though, with all our labour, we had acquired no solid and enduring gains. Old weaknesses prove too strong for our new strength ; old wounds re-open, bleeding into new languors, smarting into new pains ; our feet are still caught in nets which we have a thousand times broken through ; the accustomed snare is *spread in our sight* and yet we are taken in it. The heights of duty on which we would fain stand are still as steep and difficult as ever, “ the shining table-lands ” as far off ; and we begin, if not to doubt of the possibility of goodness, yet to despair of ever becoming good.

In short, the whole air of both the worlds in which we

live, the external and the internal, is tainted with an infection whose touch has passed upon us; a disease is in the atmosphere we daily breathe: we need a medicine which shall either prevent us from succumbing to its malign influence, or restore us if we have fallen sick,—a counteractive to the poison we have inspired.

The true medicine, the medicine that will do us good, is a cheerful heart. This sovereign disinfectant will keep the air immediately about us sweet, and will also sweeten the air about the beds of the neighbouring sick. If the heart be settled in a thankful rest, it is strong for endeavour and for endurance. Labours before which a despondent heart faints are easy to a brave cheerfulness. Falls which break the bones of the weak are a stimulus and a theme for laughter to the strong. Cares which seem intolerable to the outworn and depressed sit lightly on the refreshed and buoyant spirit. The clouds which hang, black and threatening, in the heaven of the brooding and dejected soul—obscuring the very providence of God, turn their silver lining on the trustful, and speak of a more perfect light at hand. Even the sense of failure and shortcoming which afflicts the fearful self-questioning heart, obstructing its progress and causing the very lapses it fears, nerves the hopeful to fresh efforts to make the crooked straight and the rough places plain.

Nor, though at first it might seem otherwise, is any curative so good for our sorrowful neighbour as that cheerfulness which is our own best preventive and safeguard. To weep with them that weep is indeed a duty, and, as assuring them of our sympathy, will be helpful to them; but if we can only weep, how shall we ever staunch their tears? Pity is sweet, and grateful to us, if it be the unassuming pity of those whom we love; but through the pity which shares our grief there must run a growing strain of strengthening hopefulness, if we

are to be comforted into patience, and to rise from patience into the hope that maketh not ashamed. Those who can only pity us, and are no less dejected by sympathy than we by sorrow, add to our sorrow, and weigh us down when they should lift us up : in place of, first, confining the waters of affliction within due bounds, and, then, shedding on them the bright lights of cheerful day, with their tears they swell the bitter stream till it breaks all bounds and plunges into a sullen darkness. And hence, to those who toss on weary beds of pain there is no medicine of a more sovereign quality than the tender patient face of one who has over-mastered a grief more profound and poignant than their own, or the bright natural cheerfulness of those who will not believe that any cloud can quite put out the sun. *The Comforter* is almighty; and every comforter must be strong enough to lift his brother's burden as well as pitiful enough to grieve over the shoulders it has galled.

But, it may be objected :—"This strong and strengthening cheerfulness is after all very much a matter of natural temperament ; it does not lie within the scope of the *will* : some men are born with a merry heart, and, without effort, do good wherever they go ; while others are so organized as to be the inevitable prey of despondency." Are you advised of that ? No Christian can be, or at least should be, at the mercy of the Fatalist conclusion. The merciful God, who is afflicted in all our afflictions, who has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows, does not ask impossibilities of us : He asks us to give nothing to Him which He does not, or will not, first give to us. And it is He who enjoins cheerfulness, who bids us carry the medicine of a merry heart through a world smitten with sorrowful infections. Past all doubt there is a diversity in our natural organizations, and their resulting temperaments, which makes it more difficult for some than for others to

do good like a medicine : but what are our difficulties to Him with whom all things are possible ? If He bids us do that which it is hard for us to do, it is only because He intends to bestow on us the intenser energies of his grace ; and He can turn water, even bitter water, into the wine that maketh the heart glad ! And He has bidden us be of a good, a cheerful, heart. It is not simply that the revelation of his truth, through the whole scale of its tones, is set in the major key, occasional minors and discords serving only to enhance the brightness of the prevailing harmony ; it is not simply that we may infer the duty of carrying a cheerful heart with us from the royal law of charity : God has also given us express and repeated injunctions to *rejoice*, to *rejoice evermore*, even in the day of tribulation,—injunctions which, because given to all, are no less binding on the man or melancholic temperament than on those who are naturally gay.

Nay, more : In his kindly wisdom, He has devoted one whole book of Scripture—the Bible being a literature rather than a book—to the task of enforcing a cheerful enjoyment of his gifts and our labours ; although, with our usual perversity, we have mistaken *that* of all books for the most mournful and saddening in the Sacred Canon. Mainly because we think so much on the surfaces of things instead of toward their centre, and are, therefore, more apt to seize on the letter that killeth than on the spirit which giveth life, we have most of us regarded the book of ECCLESIASTES simply as a manifold variation on the mournful theme, “Vanity of vanities : all is vanity !” the wise Preacher’s cheerful inspiring music has saddened into a dirge. Yet, as Ewald has long since shewn, it is impossible to bring an understanding studious heart to the book without discovering that its true and ruling intention is to encourage men, perplexed by change and dejected by the

dis-illusionizing processes of experience, to a patient endurance of inevitable disappointments, and a prompt hearty enjoyment of the remaining and sufficient goods of life. The constant and recurring moral of the book is, that "everything is beautiful in its season," and in its season should be thankfully enjoyed, without too curious an inquest into its probable genesis and duration ; that there is nothing better, that it is the last result of wisdom, for a man to "enjoy all the good of his labour ;" and that this capacity of wise enjoyment is God's best gift to man.

The cheerful heart that medicines our pain is, then, the gift of God ; and because it is the gift of God, it is open to us all, however delicate or saturnine our natural temperament may be. And like all other the gifts of God, we come upon it while we are walking in the path of obedience. To "fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man," even as to take the good of God's gifts and his own labours is the best happiness of man ; and only by doing the duty do we reach the happiness. If we would do good like a medicine, we must become good by the obediences of faith. *Of faith:* for by faith alone are we set free to obey the commandments ; in faith alone have we the power of obedience. To a wise enjoyment of the present it is indispensable both that the past should be clear of guilt, and that the future should be clear of anxious doubt. We cannot climb the difficult steep of duty with a heavy burden on our back ; nor shall we care to climb them if the table-lands above, instead of shining in their natural radiance, are dark with wrathful mists drawn from the waters of misgiving. The burden must be unbound, the mists dispersed, before duty will grow attractive to us, or our heart, like a released bird springing up into its native heaven, break forth into singing. It is because the burden *has* been unbound—borne for us by Him who

died on the redeeming cross ; it is because the mists *have* been dispersed, life and immortality shining with unclouded radiance from the top of the mountain which we must climb in order that we may see the face of God and be satisfied with his likeness : it is because God *has* made an atoning sacrifice and set a great light of hope to rule our day, that we can, every one of us, enjoy present good with a merry heart. The past *is* clear from sin, if only we believe on Christ ; and if we believe on Him, the future is all bright with promise. There is nothing, save the weakness of our faith, to impede our obedience, or to jar the music of our cheerfulness into jangling discords of discontent.

If, then, it be the highest wisdom to secure the highest good within our reach, it is *our* highest wisdom to keep our hearts sweet and merry by vital faith in God, in the redemption He has wrought, in the providence which He administers. The cares of business will not unduly tax the strength of him who firmly believes that, while he is bound to discharge the duties of his vocation with all diligence, he is not answerable for the issue of his toils ; and that the hand of Him who doeth all things well “shapes our ends” for us, “rough hew them how we will.” The solicitudes of home will not *prey* upon the heart which trusts a God who is a Husband to the widow and a Father to the fatherless ; who guides the steps of all committed to his care with a more than paternal wisdom, and comforts them in all their sorrows as a mother comforts her ailing or frightened child. The innumerable miseries and evils that are in the world,—miseries so immitigable, evils so profound, as almost to break our hearts in our more weary and brooding moments, will *not* break our hearts if we truly believe in the fatherly Providence which still evolves good out of things evil and changes every winter into spring. Nor shall we sink into a

despairing shame as we review the progress of our personal spiritual life, marking its failures and shortcomings with an angry wonder at our persistent folly, or with an almost hopeless sense of our inbred weakness, if only we hold fast our faith in the redemption of God ; a redemption wrought for the weak and foolish, a redemption which will know no close till it lands us, body and soul, complete glorified men, in the heaven in which He dwells. Let us put our trust in Him, renewing our trust by frequent meditation and worship, and in renewing our trust, we shall renew our youth of spirit ; however incredible it may seem to our present halting faith, we shall subdue our natural despondencies and doubts and fears, and carry the medicine of a cheerful heart through a world all infected and diseased with sorrows bred of sin, a medicine which, while preserving us in health, will also have healing for them that are sick.

XIV.

The Moral of Change.

ECCLESIASTES VII. 14.

“Sperat infestis, metuit secundis,
Alteram sortem bene præparatum
Pectus.” HORACE, Lib. II. Car. x.

OUR life is a strange tangle. With what rapid yet uncertain alternations we pass from mirth to grief! Nay, how marvellously are good and evil, sorrow and gladness, blended in almost every act we do and every accident that befalls us! Whoever may order our lives for us, it is very certain that the ordering of them is not left in *our* hands. If it were, our emotions would be more simple, our conditions more stable and more constant; we should abide in prosperity, our joy would be unmixed with grief. As it is, we live in a constant flux of change. We know not what a day may bring forth. Almost all we know of to-morrow is that it will *not* be as to-day; it may be more abundant, but its abundance is just as likely to be burdensome and painful to us as it is to be helpful and invigorating. To-day we may be clothed in garments of heaviness, to-morrow we may exchange them for the robes of mirth. To-day we try with trembling lips to frame some words of comfort for those who mourn an irreparable loss; to-morrow our lips run over with laughter and utter good wishes for those who sit at the very climax of joy and

hope. In a few hours, perhaps in one, we pass from a wedding to a deathbed, from a birth to a funeral. We never continue in one stay ; we shift through a series of perpetual changes, to one thing constant never. Nay, even at the same moment, the same circumstances breed contradictory emotions in us, and our hearts are wasted by conflicting currents of passion. The gladness of prosperity is dashed by the new weight of labour and responsibility it imposes on us ; or by the fear that it will soon pass and leave us more destitute than before ; or by the fact that it has come too late, and that those for whose sakes we most cared for it have gone beyond our reach, and can no longer share it with us. The sadness of adversity is relieved by the kindnesses of friends, by the new knowledge it brings us of the worth or unworth of those who have professed much goodwill for us, by our indignation against those who have injured us, or by the novel sense of strength, strength to bear and to dare all things, which it awakens within us.

Now it is quite impossible that we, who are subject to so many changes, so many accidents, so many surprises, should not speculate and ask questions about the source from which they all flow, and the meaning or purpose with which they are fraught. And of course, when these questions are distinctly raised, we reply : " It is God who ordains all our circumstances, and changes of circumstance ; and because God is good, all things are working together for our good." We say that ; but do we always quite mean and believe it ? Not quite, nor always, I fear. For when the changes of life are adverse to our wishes, when they injure our interests or supposed interests, we find it very hard to believe that God is good, and that He is doing us good. It may with reason be doubted whether any one of us is so wise that he would not at times, if he had the power, arrange things more to his mind than God does. If when trade is slack we could

secure a large and steady demand for our wares, would trade be slack with us long? If we could secure fine weather when we want it, or think we do, should we not forbid the rain to fall and the tempest to rave? If we could prevent the death of a husband, a wife, a child, or if we could arrest any change adverse to our affections or to our temporal interests, should we not at least be *tempted* to pit our wisdom against the wisdom of God, and to take our way rather than his? It would seem then, whatever we may say, and however honestly we may mean it for the moment, that we do not always quite believe God to be good and to be doing us good; we do not believe that all the changes of our life are ruled by his large kind wisdom, so ruled as to promote our true interest and our true happiness.

The language we commonly use about the accidents of life points to the same conclusion. A ship goes down at sea, but a few of the crew get into a boat that rides out the storm, or "some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship" they come safe to land; and we say, "What a merciful providence!" Yes; but if there was a merciful providence in the rescue of the few, was there no providence in the loss of the many? A husband sickens toward death; the doctors give him up; his wife and children lose all hope: but by some mysterious recuperative energy he suddenly mends; he recovers, and their mouths are filled with laughter and praise. Again we say, "What a kind providence!" Yes; but in the very hour of his recovery a hundred men, each as dear to their wives and children as he to his, passed into the silence and separation of death. Was there no providence in their deaths; or was that providence not kind? A lad and lass who love each other dearly have been kept apart by judicious or injudicious friends; at last they overcome all obstacles, and are married with the frank consent of those who lately opposed their

union. We triumph in the triumph of a true constant affection, and say, "God has been very good to them!" He *has* been good to them; but there are hundreds of unhappy lovers in the world for whom no marvel is wrought, and who are kept apart to the very end. Is not God good to these? Are the miserable, the separated, the afflicted, the bereaved, in addition to all their other burdens and griefs, to be told that God does not care for them, that no providence, or no kind favouring providence, watches over them and graciously orders their steps? To say *that* would be to say that God cares least for those who most need his care; that He is like base selfish men, and fills the rich with good things, while the poor He sends empty away! Who could love and honour such a God as that? Not even the selfish rich man himself, for even he, if he is to have a God at all, must have a God a little better than himself.

We may be very certain, then, that, as surely as there is a God, his providence extends to all the changes and accidents of human life, adverse as well as prosperous, sorrowful as well as joyful. And this conclusion of instinct and reason is confirmed by the wise Hebrew Preacher. He says:—"In the day of prosperity be thou content; and in the day of adversity remember that God hath made this as well as that, in order that man should not be able to foresee that which is to come." He affirms that "both this and that," both adversity and prosperity, are "made" and sent by God; that the unhappy and afflicted stand within the circle of his providence no less than the fortunate and successful. Nay, more; not content with affirming that God conducts the whole vicissitude of human life, the Preacher also affirms that this vicissitude is a "beautiful vicissitude," that it has a most gracious meaning and end.

This much-experienced Sage, who, in his quest of the chief good, had tried all the extremes of fortune, argues that

both prosperity and adversity have their peculiar dangers, and leaves us to imply that it would not be good of God to permit us to be too long exposed either to the one or to the other, that it is good of Him to drive us hither and thither before uncertain winds of change.

What, then, is the danger of prosperity? It is not quite the danger we might have supposed : it is *discontent*. *That*, we might have thought, is the special danger of the poor and troubled, not of those who prosper in their way. And yet when we begin to study the ways of men, we soon discover that those who are well to do or rich are, as a rule, much vexed with discontent. *As a rule*, I believe, those who are most fluent in complaint are not men who are doing a small trade, but men who are doing a large trade ; not even those who are losing money, but those who are making it. You shall hear more murmurs and frets from a fine lady lapped in luxury in a single hour than from many a poor hard-working woman in a whole day. You will often find that as a man prospers in his trade or profession, and rises towards wealth, his heart grows fuller and fuller of care and vexation ; he talks more gloomily of his position and prospects, and does less for the service of God and man. Do we not all see and know that, while loss and pain and care often train men in patience, resignation, trust in God, content with his will, those who prosper and grow rich are in constant peril of losing their love for quiet simple pleasures, for mental culture, for spiritual service ; in constant peril of sinking into so eager a pursuit of greater wealth, or higher position, or wider influence, as that they cannot be satisfied with such things as they have or use them to noble purpose? Even when they have so much that they hardly know how to "bestow their goods," they still ask for more. Now, what is the very kindest thing God can do for a man whose very prosperity breeds discontent, care, distrust. Surely it is to take his prosperity

away from him, and so to give him at least a chance of learning what humble content is like. If he cannot be at rest, if he cannot grow in knowledge, faith, joy, peace, while he is "well off," by all means let him become "ill off;" he may then learn that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things which he possesseth; that true peace does not lie in having all things go to his mind, but in a cheerful and unforced acceptance of the will of God. Many a man is proud of his estate or business—of the economy, order, and exact adjustment of part to part which mark its management, who ought to be very much ashamed of the neglected state of his conscience and heart. Many a woman is proud of her diamonds who cares little for the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. It is his conscience and heart, not his estate or business, it is her spirit, not her diamonds, which he and she will carry into the eternal world with them; and if God can only induce them to cultivate spirit and conscience and heart, by taking their diamonds and possessions away from them, is it not most merciful of Him to take these away, and so quicken them unto life eternal?

What is the danger of adversity? It is, as the Hebrew Preacher suggests, *despair*. The man who is long steeped in penury, or disappointment and defeated hope, is apt to forget that the ills of life are sent by God, that the Divine Providence is over him no less than over the lucky, the successful, the opulent. We instinctively regard prosperity and good luck as signs of the Divine favour; we instinctively take pain and misfortune as signs of the Divine displeasure. We think God is angry with us if we do not get on, if we do not carry out our schemes and reach our aims. Yet the best and greatest of those born of woman, the only Perfect Man, was poor, despised, and sorrowful. He had not where to lay his head till he pillowed it on the cross; the world gave him no home but a tomb. *That* of itself might teach us that good

men do not always get on ; that God does not always give those whom He loves best happiness and success.

This, however, is a lesson we find it hard to learn. If we are left long in our poverty and trouble we grow "deject and wretched;" in our dejection we begin to despair of ourselves and to distrust the mercy of God. No peril is more threatening to our spiritual life than the bitter heartbreaking spasms of self-despair and self-contempt, which at times torment the man for whom the world seems to have no work, no place, no use, the man in whose hand everything fails. And, therefore, in his great mercy God often relieves our dejection, and recovers us from our misery. Commonly, indeed, we do not pass in an instant from one extreme of human fortune to the other ; we are not beggars to-day and rich in lands and goods to-morrow ; we are not, like Job, stripped of all we hold dear in a day, and in a day enriched with more than we had lost. The process is more gradual, better adapted to our weakness, to which sudden and large changes are always hazardous. The darkness of our sorrow grows bright with a few faint and scattered rays of hope ; or the light of our prosperity gradually darkens over with gathering clouds of loss and disappointment, with which the light cannot long contend. In strange subtle ways we are elated and depressed ; small changes pass on our outward conditions which produce large interior changes ; a little success or a little happiness excites a great hope, or a small disappointment, a trifling loss, excites many regrets and fears, much shame and care, heavy foreboding. And thus, at the touch of wholly disproportionate causes, we swing from mood to mood, from change to change—all things bright at one moment, all soon dimmed, our hearts being for ever tossed on shifting currents of hope and fear.

What *is* the meaning of it all ? What is God driving at ? What is the purpose and end of this perpetual vicissitude ?

Why does He not leave us alone, that we may know a little rest before we go hence and are no more seen?

The wise Hebrew Preacher answers this question also; though at first, I confess, his answer sounds very inadequate and perplexing. All he has to say is, that God conducts us through these adverse and prosperous changes "*in order that man should not be able to foresee that which is to come.*" If that be God's end, there can be no doubt that He attains it. For, as I have said, the play of change across our life is so swift and incessant, that almost the only thing we know about to-morrow is that we cannot tell what it will bring forth. If all God means is to make the future dark to us, if *this* be the moral of change, if this be the Divine purpose and intention of it, then beyond all question that purpose is achieved; for with respect to that which is to come we are completely, hopelessly, in the dark. We know, indeed, that changes will come, and must come; but we cannot foresee when, or how, or to whom they will come. There is not one of us who can penetrate the future, and say, "*This is what will happen to me.*"

Nay, even if we could foresee that which is to come to us, we could not say whether it would work us good or ill, so blind are we, so helpless. If we were to acquire competence or wealth, *that* might seem a good to us; and yet it might prove the worst of ills, by releasing us from those habits of active labour on which the health of body and mind depends, by inducing indolent self-indulgent habits, by withdrawing our thoughts from God, and our dependence on Him, and the service we owe Him. Were we to lose a child to-day, we might call that a loss and mourn over it as an irreparable calamity; and then, within a week, God might call us to Himself, and there is our child waiting to welcome us home, and our loss turns out to be great gain. Or a child is born to us, and we rejoice because we have got good; but in a

few years the child sickens and dies, or it turns out ill, or *we* sicken and die, or *we* turn out ill, and all we have got is new care, new sorrow. We walk on a path which may break off abruptly at any step, even the next; beneath a sky which may darken at any moment, even the next. We can neither calculate the issues of our most trivial action, nor count on the stability of our most constant mood. We cannot foresee how soon an entire change may sweep over our whole prospect, nor what the character of that change may be. We stand, blind, before a great darkness, through which huge but dim forms of menace and of promise flit confusedly, and are shaken by forebodings which may be falsified by the event, or are radiant with hopes which are only too likely to make us ashamed.

Is *this* all that God means by hiding the future from us? Does He only want that we should feel how blind and helpless we are—blind to foresee, helpless to avert, the changes which are approaching us? No; this is not all. The whole scope of the Hebrew Preacher proves that even he meant to suggest more to us than this. He meant to teach us that, because we are helpless and blind, we must put our trust in the God who “makes this as well as that,” who has hidden the future from us that we may commit our way to Him to whom the future is present. Our prosperity is shattered or our adversity relieved, our joy sinks towards sadness, or our sadness rises into joy, that, feeling our own inability to command our circumstances and emotions, we may remember and confide in Him who “orders all things as He please.” *This* is the true moral of change; this is what it teaches us, and was meant to teach us: to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; to trust in God, and, because we trust in Him, not to fret ourselves because of him who prospereth in his way by bringing wicked devices to pass.

Is this simple moral of such vital importance to our welfare, then, that it is worth while we should lie at the mercy of so many accidents, and walk through life so blindly, in order to learn it? Ah, yes, it is—it is. For, first of all, we are apt to think too much of mere outward good and ill, to care too much about prosperous and adverse conditions. If we could tell what was about to happen, if we could make things happen to our mind, we should shrink from all pain and loss; we should surround ourselves with comforts and enjoyments; we should dwell in an unbroken prosperity; no change, nor fear of change, would perplex our breasts. And, meantime, all that is noblest and best in us, all the high faculties which can only be developed under the pressure of necessity, would be left impotent and untrained. Our life would not be worth having could we order it to our mind.

“O life ! without thy chequered scene
Of right and wrong, of weal and woe,
Success and failure—could a ground
For magnanimity be found,
For faith, mid ruined hopes serene ?
Or whence could virtue flow ? ”

And, again, whatever uncertainties may be hidden in the future, it also contains some certainties, some changes and events which *must* shortly come to pass. It is very certain, for instance, that we must die; and how are we to meet death without fear if we do not trust in God, if we cannot then commit our souls to his care who rules the world to which we go no less than the world we leave behind us? While if we do trust in Him, if we can commit our souls into the hands of a Creator whom we have tried and found faithful, what harm can death do us, what terror can it have for us? If God be with us, and love us, and we love Him, the death that takes us a little nearer to Him, and lets us

see his love more clearly, *that can* have no danger for us, no terror.

The life in death and beyond it is also among the certainties of the future ; and how can we hope for a happy immortality unless we trust in God ? unless by a present trust in Him we prepare and nerve ourselves for the untried conditions of the life to be ? All its conditions, unknown to us, are familiar to Him ; and, if we suffer *Him* to order our steps for us and follow *Him* with a cheerful goodwill, He will train us for the world and the life of which we know so little, but He knows all.

Whether for this life, then, or for that which is to come, we need, beyond all other needs, to put our trust in God. And therefore it is good of God, and good for us, that we should have prosperity and adversity strangely blended in our lot, that He should send us "both this and that." As we cannot tell what may happen, we are obliged, if we would know any rest or peace, to trust Him who *can* tell what will happen. Simply because a filial trust in our Father in heaven is the sole condition of happy peaceful life in all worlds, in eternity as in time, it is most kind and gracious of Him to teach us that truth, even though, in order to beat it into us, He has to expose us to a constant vicissitude.

Does any man object : " But might we not have learned this lesson and gained this good on easier terms ? " Let him draw his answer from our common experience. Long and painfully as God has been teaching us this lesson, have we even yet learned to trust Him fully ? and if not, how should we have learned it on easier terms ? In order that He might disclose our weakness to us, and assure us of the absolute necessity of an absolute confidence in his wisdom and goodness, He has made our life a mere vicissitude, a perpetual succession of happy and mournful changes ; He has made all the conditions of our life so insecure *that* we

cannot foresee that which is to come a day, or an hour, hence. Not a day passes, not an hour, but that we are reminded of the irresistible power of the forces amid which we move, and of the inscrutable counsels of that Will by which they are animated. And if with all this sharp and constant teaching we have not learned to commit our way unto God, there is not the slightest chance that we should have learned to rest in Him had the lesson been taught less incessantly, less impressively.

The conclusion of the whole matter is simply this : God has made us for Himself ; made us, that is, to be like Himself, to share his perfect blessedness and peace. By smiles or frowns, by prosperity and adversity, He compels us to look up to Him ; to rise to the height of our nature ; to place our treasure and affections beyond the reach of change ; to value most that which is worth most and lasts the longest ; to find a deeper peace than we sought, and a more perfect happiness. He will no more leave us alone than a wise father would leave children alone who cared only for toys and sports and sweetmeats.- He *will have* us to our books, and make men of us. If we are lazy and wilful, we may get more of the rod than we shall like to have ; but, willing or unwilling, by rod or by smile, He means to make men of us, true men, and good, and strong. Is not that the best proof of his love for us ? Let us thank Him, then, for the love which moves Him to correct and train us for his service, for his joy—now by the stripes of adversity, and again by the gifts of prosperity ; let us set ourselves, as to the chief task of life, to learn and practise a simple, constant, filial trust in Him.

XV.

Isaiah's Ode on the Fall of Babylon.

ISAIAH XXI. 1—10.

THE conquest of Babylon by the Perso-Medic army of Cyrus is, thanks to Daniel, one of the most familiar incidents of ancient history. The defence of that great city against the open and direct assault of his troops had been so skilful that Cyrus long despaired of success. As a last resource, he ventured on a stratagem so critical, so hazardous, as to prove that he at least did not fear "to put his fortune to the touch, and win or lose it all."

Withdrawing his forces from the vicinity of Babylon, he retired to a distance along the banks of the Euphrates. Here, selecting a suitable spot, he set his troops to cut channels by which the main volume of its waters might be diverted from their course. When the channels were cut he waited for the arrival of a great feast in which, to pay due honour to their gods, the inhabitants of the city were wont to indulge in drunken revelry. The feast came, and was kept with unusual splendour and extravagance. As though to mark his contempt for the enemy, Belshazzar the king abandoned himself to the spirit of the hour, and gave a drinking banquet to a thousand of his lords. The whole city, with steady loyalty, followed the example of the king, and plunged into "pious orgies" in which riot and excess

were blended with religious frenzy. The public danger was forgotten. No sufficient precautions were taken against surprise. The gates opening on the river were neither closed nor guarded. A single sentinel on the alert might have saved the city. Soldiers however are not famous for their abstinence ; and the guards deserted their posts and revelled with the citizens unrebuked.

Meantime the Persians opened their sluices, and let off the water till the river became fordable. They marched on and on for miles between the lofty massive walls which protected the banks of the stream ; and in which, as the Greek historian* remarks, had they been detected, they would have been caught "as in a trap" and destroyed man by man without any possibility of escape or defence. They reached the open and unguarded gates which led up from the river to the heart of the city. They rose like shadows in the darkness from the stream—formed into column—advanced ; and then commenced a slaughter grim and great. The drunken revellers could render no assistance. The king was paralyzed with fear at the miraculous handwriting which sprang from the wall of his banqueting-room to announce that he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. The Persians burst into the palace, and slew him and his lords in the midst of their orgy. They carried fire and sword through the city. When the morning broke, the empire had passed from the Babylonian to the Persian dynasty.

This, in brief outline, is the tragic story of the fall of Babylon, a story with which we have been familiar from childhood. Familiar to us, it was also familiar to the prophet Isaiah, although he lived a hundred and fifty years before the city fell into the hands of the Medes and Persians. In prophetic vision he foresaw the very event on which we look back, although the Babylonian Empire was *then* in the

* Herodotus i. 191.

very prime and fulness of its power. His foresight of this great catastrophe was indeed so vivid and intense, and has come down to us in forms so abrupt and grand, that, as we study them and arrive at the conception that was in his mind, the old story becomes instinct with new power and impresses us with a new and profounder awe.

The vision is recorded in the first ten verses of Chapter xxi. of his Prophecy : but these verses are so crowded with historical allusions, they breathe emotions so passionate, thought and passion change so swiftly into new forms, that probably very few of us have been at the pains to master them. If we would master them, the very first thing we have to do is to understand that Isaiah was a poet, and that the "fine frenzy" of the poet was never more fully upon him than when he penned this "burden" or recited this "oracle." He is like one that dreams and speaks his dream. There is none of the clear order of the historian or the homilist in this sublime poem, though ordinarily Isaiah is singularly clear and lucid in his style. For the moment he is in an ecstasy ; whether in the body or out of the body he cannot tell. He is caught up to a height from which he beholds the future ; the shadows of coming events crowd and pass before him. And, like St. Paul in his trance, Isaiah sees things which cannot be uttered, and things which can only be hinted at in bardic symbols and measures. So that, before we take his meaning, we have to translate his poetry into prose, to expand his hints, to explain his allusions, to interpret his symbols, to reduce his dramatic utterances and impersonations within the limits of simple narrative.

The very title of his vision, or of this poetic record of his vision, is both a riddle and a poem. He calls it "The Burden," or, to use a word which carries the Hebrew sense more nearly to modern ears, "The *Oracle* of the Desert of the Sea." "The Desert of the Sea" is the Prophet's

name for Babylon; and as Babylon was a large and most fertile inland plain, no name could at first seem more inappropriate to it: it was not "a sea," or near the sea: it was not "a desert," for of all lands it was the most prolific of grain. That the name was nevertheless appropriate we may infer from the fact that Herodotus,* the Greek historian, speaks of this vast fertile plain in similar terms. The plain on which Babylon stood ran at the South into the Arabian desert, and owed its amazing fertility to the innumerable fountains and springs which rose up in it, and to the great rivers which flowed through it. Of these the mighty Euphrates, fed by the mountain snows and rains which poured into it through a thousand affluents, used annually to overflow the whole land, transforming it into a sea, until the great Assyrian despots cut their canals and constructed the massive dams which held the river within its bounds. "Desert of the Sea," therefore, was probably an ancient name, and was certainly no inappropriate name, for the Babylonian plain. On the Prophet's lips, moreover, the title is said to have had a moral, no less than a physical, significance. The cruel and idolatrous Babylonians were as "a desert" in which the national life and faith of race after race perished and was lost. As "the sea" pours forth its waves to beat on every shore, so Babylon sent out a multitude of armies to sweep over and destroy all lands. It is to set it forth in this malign and destructive aspect that the Prophet gives it a name which blends the two things most terrible to the ancient Oriental mind—the sea and the desert. Both sea and desert were then held to be homes of mystery and dread, fatal to man. And therefore Babylon, the enemy, the ruthless conqueror and destroyer of all nations—fatal, dreadful, irresistible—might fitly be called the Desert of the Sea.

* Herodotus i. 184.

Of this fierce cruel race Isaiah is about to speak. He is to tell a vision he has had, a vision which sums up all the oracular intimations concerning Babylon which he has received from on high; a vision which, because it gave the sum and substance of all he knew and foreknew of that great wicked city, he entitles, "*The Burden*," or "*The Oracle of the Desert of the Sea*."

So much for the title of the poem. Now take its opening lines—

- "1. Like as whirlwinds rush on in the South,
So it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land."

Mark the indefiniteness of the object in this sentence, and what grandeur it gives to the verse. "*It cometh from the desert*." It! What? *That* is precisely the question which a man in a dream, in a trance, would not stop to ask. He would be content simply to feel that something terrible was sweeping across the scene and that it came from a terrible land. He would not pause to ask what it was, or to demand that it should take definite shape. And in recording his vision, Isaiah breathes a vague terror, such as he himself had felt, into his words, and through his words into our hearts. Before he tells us in plain terms that his vision was very terrible to him, he leaves an impression of terror on our minds. From the dreaded mysterious Desert, the very home of terrors, there sweeps up a breath, an influence, a vague undefined horror, as full of menace and affright as the storms which rush up from the tropical regions of the South. Layard, on the very site of Babylon, has described these storms as they come rushing out of the South, filling the air with sand, blotting out the lights of heaven, clouding mid-day with the darkness of night, poisoning men with their fiery breath, and at times smiting down massive houses, or even whole villages, to the ground. And as all Nature is

menaced, shaken, convulsed by these fiery tempests, these whirlwinds which carry havoc and death in their wings, so Isaiah is shaken and convulsed by the storm of terror which suddenly springs up in his soul.

“ 2. A grievous vision is declared unto me :
The spoiler spoileth and the destroyer destroys.
‘Go up, O Elam ; besiege, O Media :
I will put an end to all her sighing.’ ”

It is this that has shaken him—the grievous vision and the awful voice. As he looks more steadfastly through the storm of terror and grows familiar with the scene, Babylon shapes itself to him as a plunderer and a murderer, spoiling and destroying on every hand ; while, above her, there sounds the awful voice of the Divine Majesty summoning her foes to go up against her. No truer image of the fierce cruel race which the genius of Nebuchadnezzar raised to be the ruling race of the world could be given than that of “ the spoiler ” and “ the destroyer. ” Dissolute and luxurious in their habits, the Babylonians hid under their soft luxurious exterior a fierceness, an insatiable lust of blood, such as has marked many Eastern tribes—such, for instance, as we ourselves have often found in “ the mild Hindoo. ” The Hebrew prophets describe them as “ a bitter and hasty, ” a “ terrible and dreadful ” people, “ fiercer than the evening wolves, ” a people who “ made the earth tremble and did shake kingdoms ; ” and all the historians of that time charge them with a savage thirst for blood which often took the most brutal and ferocious forms. They conquered wellnigh all the kingdoms of the then known world ; they pillaged every country they conquered : and often went far to depopulate the countries they pillaged. In Judea, for instance, the land became a mere haunt of wild beasts after the Babylonians had subdued it ; and from Jerusalem they pillaged even the

sacred vessels of the Temple. What wonder, then, that in vision they appeared to Isaiah as "the spoiler spoiling and the destroyer destroying?"

As, in his vision, he contemplates the fierce race in whose steps trod ruin and destruction, a great voice sounds through the air, summoning the enemies of Babylon to go up against it and besiege it. It is the voice of Jehovah that cries, "Go up, O Elam; besiege, O Media." There would be no obscurity in this sublime challenge, this Divine command, to Isaiah. For as Elam was a *prophetic* name of Persia, and the *historic* name of a Mesopotamian province lately conquered and added to the Persian Empire, he would understand that Jehovah was summoning the Medes and Persians to destroy the vast populous city of Babylon. But wherefore does Jehovah utter the command? Is He only a mightier despot that He should cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war? Does He delight in blood? Has He any pleasure even in the death of the wicked? No: it is because He is the true King and Father of men, because He hates death and oppression and wrong, that He issues the command. He has heard, He has heard the sighing of the captives who have lain so long at the caprice of the fierce cruel Babylonians. They may have thought themselves forgotten, abandoned of Heaven, amid the accumulating miseries of their captivity; but Heaven has not forgotten them, nor He that sitteth in the heavens. He has counted their sighs—sighing with them, and has been afflicted in all their afflictions. And now He comes out of his place to avenge and deliver them, "to put an end to all their sighing," to still their lamentations.

Isaiah beholds the impending vengeance; and though he rejoices in it, it is nevertheless "a grievous vision" to him; a vision so grievous that as it passes before him, he cries:

“3. My loins are filled with pain ;
Pangs have taken hold of me
Like the pangs of a woman in travail
I writhe so that I cannot hear ;
I am bowed down so that I cannot see :
“4. My heart throbs :
Horror hath bewildered me :
The darkness of night which I love
He hath turned for me into quaking.”

A more graphic description of the nightmare horror inspired by a terrible dream was surely never penned. The Prophet, his nerves all wrung and fevered by the exhausting labours of his daily ministry, loves the dusk of evening, the cool of the day, in which he may be still and meditate on God : it brings him calm thoughts and peaceful repose. But not to-night, not to-night. For to-night he falls into a trance ; his spirit is carried forward through the years : it is the night of doom to the Babylonian Empire, night of judgment, night of terrors. And as he contemplates it, his spirit is racked and convulsed with anguish and affright. His heart throbs ; his loins are cramped with pain, torn with throes ; he writhes so that he cannot hear ; he is so bent down and bowed together with the fierce spasms which torment him that he can see nothing clearly ; he is stunned and bewildered with horror. But why? What is Babylon to him or he to Babylon, that he should be thus “broken and distract” at the mere foresight of her fall?

We too commonly and hastily conclude that the great Hebrew prophets and psalmists cared only for the Hebrews, for *their* interests and their welfare. There are a thousand proofs in the Old Testament Scriptures that they held nothing human to be alien to them, that they cared for the whole human family ; that, in proportion as they were “in the Spirit,” their love for all men grew true and deep. And here is one of the proofs. Isaiah was a Jew—a Jewish

patriot; and therefore he felt with and for the Jews—felt first and most for them: but Isaiah was also *a man*, a man of God; and therefore he felt with and for all the men whom God had made. As he forecasts the terrors which are about to fall upon the heathen world, he is terrified; their judgment smites him with an intolerable anguish: were the doom about to alight on his own people and on himself, he could not be more profoundly touched and moved. His fine humanity, sensitive to all human woe, carries him for the time beyond the range of merely personal or national feeling. Among the captives whose sighs have entered into the heart of the Almighty King are thousands of Isaiah's own race: the Jews are in bondage to Babylon, a bondage most bitter and degrading. *They* therefore will be delivered, *their* bonds will be broken, *their* sighs will be changed to mirthful songs, when Babylon, the mistress and despot of the world, is smitten down. And yet the Hebrew Prophet, rejoicing in the joy of his people, is convulsed with anguish as he anticipates the judgment which is to set them free. They indeed will be redeemed; but, ah, at what a cost! How many miserable souls will be destroyed! What blood will be shed, what foul wrongs and shames will be inflicted on myriads, before the vast populous empire can be overthrown! Babylon must have filled in Isaiah's thoughts much the place which Rome held in the mind of a cultivated Spaniard or Carthaginian of the early Christian centuries. To him the Medes and Persians, plunging down from their unknown mysterious mountain fastnesses upon the wealthy Babylonian plain, must have seemed much as the Goths and Vandals seemed to the more civilized races of Europe when they came pouring down the Alps to carry sword and fire through the storied plains of Italy. The whole Christian world shuddered and groaned when Rome fell; and as her fall to the modern so was the fall of Babylon to the ancient world. So great

and tragical a catastrophe might well strike any thoughtful mind with awe, and rack any humane heart with pain. To Isaiah's excited and projected imagination, it shaped itself as a day of judgment, as the end of the then world : and *therefore* "his loins were filled with pain ;" "his heart throbbed" wildly as though it would burst ; he was bewildered with horror and affright. He would have been less, not more, than man, could he have beheld so vast and awful a tragedy without having his soul shaken to its profoundest depths.

How deeply he was moved is apparent from the whole structure of this poem, from its abrupt transitions, its weird changes of person and subject. It hurries on with the hurrying turbulent spirit of the Prophet. The intensity of its tone never once relaxes. Its passion is at a white heat throughout. It crowds a separate drama, a separate tragedy, into every few lines. Here is one of these tragedies :—

"5. They cover the table :
 They set the watch :
 They eat, they drink.
 'Arise, O ye princes !
 Anoint the shield !'"

Without a pause, with no word of transition to indicate the change of scene, the Prophet passes from a description of his terror as the vision passed before him, to a picture of Babylon on the night of its fall. At one moment standing beside the Prophet as he writhes and groans in his trance, at the next moment we find ourselves in the metropolis of the world, in the palace of the great king. Belshazzar gives a great feast to a thousand of his lords. In honour of the gods they are to revel through the night, although the Persian army still threatens the city. "They drank wine and praised the gods." The orgy* is at its height when a fiery hand springs from the wall to write mystic words of

* Daniel v. 4.

doom. The interpretation of the writing fills the revellers with consternation; and while they stand amazed, the guards rush in to announce that the Persians have entered the city and are at the palace gates. This is the scene which Isaiah describes in the curt graphic words of this verse, the tragedy which he compresses into a few lines. "They cover the table," give themselves to feasting. "They set the watch," that they may revel on undisturbed, not dreaming that the watch may prove as faithless to their duty as king and lords to theirs. "They eat, they drink." And while they are flushed with wine and mirth, the faithless guards break into the banqueting-hall with the cry of battle: "Arise, O ye princes! Anoint the shield!" calling them to instant war.

This, then, is the first scene in Isaiah's vision; the first intimation he has of the meaning of that great horror which has fallen upon him in his trance. The splendid palace of Babylon, blazing with lights, breaks into the darkness of the night; he beholds the revellers plunged in mirth and wine, and hears the cry of alarm raised by the affrighted guards.

As yet this is all he sees. The vision is not clear. He would fain know more—fain know how the terrible doom was to be accomplished. While he is possessed by this longing, there occurs to him one of the strangest of mental phenomena—that dual action of the brain, that double consciousness, of which most of us get an occasional glimpse in our dreams. So to speak, he is no longer one man, but two; he is in two places, discharging two separate functions, at the same moment; two distinct currents of thought and feeling flow through him at the same instant of time; two voices within him question and reply: he stands apart from and criticizes himself, carrying on a dialogue as between two different persons. Isaiah habitually conceived of himself as set on a watch-tower, "the watch-

tower of divinely illuminated reason," to look out over the world and through the ages that he might discover and teach the moral laws by which God governed the lives of men, that he might warn them of the results of their actions and of the things that would shortly come to pass. And now in his dream, in his trance, he is both the watchman who stands on his high tower reporting what he sees, and the prophet who listens to the report. As I have said, our own dreams give us our best key to this singular and abnormal frame of mind, and should help us to understand the verses which follow :

"6. For thus said the Lord to me ;
Go, set a watchman :
What he seeth, let him declare.

7. And he saw an array of cavalry—
Horsemen in pairs,
An array of asses, an array of camels :
And he listened as keenly as he could listen.

8. Then he cried out like a lion,
I stand alway upon the watch-tower, O Lord, by day ;
And on the watch I keep my stand all night.

9. And, behold, here cometh the array of men—
Horsemen in pairs ;
And it crieth aloud, saying,
' Babylon is fallen, is fallen !

And He hath dashed all the images of its gods to the ground ! " "

The watchman is Isaiah himself ; it is his own projected form which stands day and night on the tower, gazing steadfastly out on the world, eager to detect any movement, any omen of change. And yet it is also Isaiah himself who receives the report of the watchman, and criticizes his bearing—his keen listening, or (as the Hebrew, borrowing a figure from the listening horse, expresses it) his "erect and stiffened ear," his impatience for a sign, his voice

growling like that of a lion. In short, it is Isaiah alone who is before us; although, with the weird double-consciousness peculiar to exalted mental states, he conceives of himself as both speaking and listening, both watching and receiving the watchman's report.

But let us translate his poetry into prose, and mark how it bears on the theme of his Ode. The first spasms and throes of horror are past; the Prophet is longing to see more clearly into the darkness which enshrouds the city of Babylon—the darkness which as yet has been broken only by the blazing palace in which the king and his lords revel and are drunken. What horrors does the night veil? What shadowy forms are those which move to and fro in the darkness around the royal palace and the walls of the city? What sounds are these which break faintly and confusedly on the silence of the night? That he may see and hear and know, he is commanded to go up—to set a watchman on a tower, as he phrases it; to arouse himself, to exert his utmost power, to strain every faculty, to scan the horizon with his most searching glance, to listen as keenly as he can. He obeys the command; and the dim forms take clearer shape. He beholds a multitudinous array, warriors riding on horses, on asses, on camels. It is the Persian army advancing through the darkness to the siege of Babylon. And it is curious, it is most instructive, to note that, while Isaiah is wrapt in the poetic fervours of a spiritual ecstasy, his observation is as keen and true as that of the most prosaic of men. No brief description of the Perso-Medic army could well have given more characteristic traits. The Medes were renowned horsemen, as we learn from the Greek historians, and rode to battle “in pairs.” In the Persian host camels and asses were a noted feature. Thus, for instance, Herodotus tells us that Cyrus gained his great victory over the Lydian army of Croesus by means of the

immense number of camels he took into the field ; * the natural antipathy of the horse to the camel throwing the Lydian cavalry into immediate confusion : and that his successor, Darius, achieved his victory over the Scythians by means of the number of asses he employed.† The Persian army *was* “ an array of cavalry—horsemen in pairs, an array of asses, an array of camels.” As the Prophet watches, the long procession sweeps on and on, in silence, through the gloom ; he can catch no sound, no cry of defeat, no note of victory, although he listens as keenly as he can listen ; till at last it vanishes in the darkness, even the stragglers in the rear having passed by, and he can see no more.

Still he stands on his tower, gazing and listening with faculties strained to their utmost tension, waiting for some decisive sign. The hours pass as hours do pass in dreams, the moments lengthening out into days ; he is half conscious that a dreadful tumultuous conflict is being waged in the darkness ; that the long terrible array which passed before him has entered the city whose king and lords he had seen revelling in their lighted halls ; that *they* have taken the alarm, and with anointed shields have rushed from their orgy to repel the invader. He waits, and listens, and looks, racked with tortures of suspense, till he can bear his suspense no longer. Losing all patience, he cries out like a lion, with the hoarse deep roar of a wounded and angry lion : “ I stand for ever upon the watch-tower, O Lord, by day ; and upon my watch I keep my stand all the nights ! ” Babylon was taken in a single night ; and the Prophet in spirit is living through that night : but to his perturbed and anxious soul it seems that many days and nights have passed, and that he is still left in suspense. He complains of God to God, cries out against being left so long at his post without receiving any decisive token of the issue of the conflict,

* Herod. i. 80

† Ibid. iv. 129.

without seeing anything but that mysterious procession which has now vanished from his sight.

He lifts up his voice like a lion ; but his cry dies away on his lips, his remonstrance is checked, his impatience rebuked. For, as he cries out, the scene once more clears ; and lo, a cavalcade issues from the darkness ! It is the very procession which he had seen before, though now shorn of its numbers. The asses and camels are no longer in the train ; only the fleet horses, the horsemen riding in pairs. Their air is joyful and elate : they carry glad tidings of victory. They are the chosen men of the Persian host despatched to carry the news of Cyrus's success to the various provinces of his empire. They clash their shields ; they brandish their spears ; they cry—and the cry enters the Prophet's heart :—" Babylon is fallen, is fallen ! And all the images of its gods hath He dashed to the ground !"

Stirring music this—is it not ? The very echo of it makes our pulse beat somewhat faster. The vast empire founded on conquest—degraded by lust, by cruelty, by injustice, by daring impieties disguised under religious forms—has fallen never to rise again. Its bestial gods are hurled from their dark thrones : " Bel boweth down ; Nebo stoopeth ; Mero-dach is broken in pieces." The Persians, with their pure faith in Ormasd, " the Master of Purity," their iconoclastic hatred against all visible representations of the great Spiritual Intelligence who rules all worlds and all men, have " dashed the graven images" of Babylon to the earth ; in which from that hour they began to rot.

This then is the issue of that mysterious conflict, the dim apprehension of which shook the Prophet's soul with an intolerable dread ; this is the light that arose upon him out of that great darkness :—The great empire of wrong destroyed, her captives set free, their sighs exchanged for rapturous songs.

Well might he conclude his Ode with the pathetic consolatory verse :—

“ 10. O thou my threshing and child of my threshing-floor !
That which I have heard from Jehovah-Sabaoth,
The God of Israel,
Have I declared unto you.”

Whatever the interpretation we may put on these words, they are instinct with a most tender grace. Most of the Commentators—and no doubt they are right—take the first sentence of the verse as a description of the people of Israel. *They* have been carried away captive into Babylon. It is Jehovah who has carried them there as to a threshing-floor, and laid them on it as a “child” is laid in the bosom. They are there that they may feel the flail of his righteous indignation against their sins. But though He judges and afflicts them, He has not forgotten to be gracious. He is simply separating the corn from the chaff, beating out of them that which is worthless or evil. They will come out of the Babylonian barn pure from their sins. And even while they groan under the strokes of judgment and conceive of God as an Enemy and an Avenger, his heart is set upon them ; they are still in his love and pity. He speaks of them with sighs of tenderness, sighs of which we catch the echo in the tender phrase, “ O thou My threshing and the child of My threshing-floor ! ”

This is one interpretation of these gracious words ; and I believe it to be as true as it is pathetic and beautiful. But surely they are also open to a larger interpretation, an interpretation which suggests that God loves all men as well as the Jews, loves them however evil they are, and however heavy the judgments with which He seeks to detach from them the evils to which they cling. Jeremiah, a later prophet than Isaiah, takes up his predecessor's figure of speech, and gives it a new and larger turn. He too speaks

of the fall, the destruction of Babylon. And in speaking of it,* he describes Jehovah as coming down into its midst "like a destroying wind;" as sending "fanners that shall fan her;" as affirming, "The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing-floor; it is time to thresh *her*; yet a little while and the time of her harvest shall come." All these images, like Isaiah's, are taken from the barn; but, according to Jeremiah, the wind and the fan are to be used on Babylon itself: Jehovah cares for the heathen no less than for the Jews, so cares for them and loves them that He is at the pains to thresh them, to separate the evil in them from the good, that the evil may be consumed and the good gathered into his garner. And I cannot but think that, if Isaiah foresaw the benefits Israel was to receive from the winnowing hand of Jehovah, he foresaw also the benefits which would accrue to the heathen. He speaks, as the verse itself informs us, in the name of Jehovah-Sabaoth, "the God of Hosts," as well as in the name of "the God of Israel." And "God of Hosts" is a title which indicates that God is the Lord of all the hosts of heaven and of earth, the God of all races and kindreds and tribes; that the Babylonians are under his rule no less than the Jews, that heathen and Hebrew are alike to Him; that with Him is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither bond nor free. Isaiah's very use of this Divine name indicates that, like Jeremiah, he held the fall of Babylon to be a divine judgment on the Babylonians—a *divine* judgment, and therefore a judgment of mercy, a judgment designed to separate the good in them from the evil and to fit them for his heavenly garner.

* Jeremiah li. 1, 2, 33. The whole Chapter indeed should be read; it contains a wonderful and sublime description of the Fall of Babylon, and shews how large a space that catastrophe occupied in the minds of men. The fiftieth Chapter is on the same theme and should also be read.

And now what lesson are *we* to learn from this Ode? It should perhaps be lesson enough that we have found a Scripture before dark grow full of light. But if other lessons be desired, let us take these two, and think them out and apply them for ourselves. (1) If the Ode teaches anything, it teaches that however sorry and reluctant God may be to afflict the children of men, He will not spare a single stroke so long as they cling to the evils which degrade and destroy them. (2) If it teaches anything, it teaches that his design in judging and afflicting us is always most merciful, that He has no pleasure in our sufferings; that He simply intends them to separate the evil in us from the good, to make us perfect and to fit us for an eternal blessedness. If we love evil in any form, if we habitually do that which is wrong, we may hide our evil habit from men, but we cannot hide it from God; nor can we evade the searching judgments by which He seeks to free us from our bonds. And when the doom falls, when the divine judgment searches us through and through, we are to remember that God is not so much angry with *us* as with the evil that is in us: we are to remember that He loves us, and, because He loves us, will make us quit our evil: we are to remember that He can only lift his judgments from us as we renounce our sins.

XVI.

The Oracle of Dumah.

One crieth to me out of Seir,
"Watchman, how far is it in the night?
How far in the night?"
Saith the Watchman:
"Morning cometh, and also night.
If ye will inquire, inquire:
Return; come again." (ISAIAH XXI. 11, 12.)

ABRUPT in form, enigmatical in meaning, this Divine oracle has nevertheless a certain grandeur and sublimity even for those to whom its sense is obscure. He who has heard Mendelssohn's "Hymn of Praise" has at least one proof of its power to excite the imagination and rouse emotion. In that fine work of art, the tenor soloist demands, in sharp ascending minors, "Watchman, will the night soon pass?" and replies, "Though the morning come, the night will come also." The demand is thrice repeated in the same sequence of notes, but each time it is raised a whole tone in the scale, to denote the growing intensity and urgency of the inquirer; thrice the answer is given in the same sequence, but for the sake of added emphasis, it also is raised a tone the second time; while in reply to the third repetition of the inquirer, the soprano breaks in with the joyful proclamation, "The night is departing," and the chorus take up and swell and prolong the glad news. As we listen, we feel that the music,

splendid as it is in itself, owes no little of its sublimity to the splendid dramatic force of the words to which it is set.

But impressive as the words are even before we apprehend their meaning, and though the very obscurity in which they are shrouded may contribute to their effect upon our imagination, if they are to teach us any clear moral lesson, we must strip them of their obscurity, and endeavour to ascertain what they really mean. It is not easy to do that; but let us at least attempt to do it as well as we can.

The oracle is "the Oracle of Dumah." What, then, is "Dumah?" "Dumah" is a prophetic name for Idumea, and Idumea was the hill-country inhabited by the descendants of Edom. As you travel south from Palestine, the goodly land—its verdure beautiful with daisies, hyacinths, and red anemones—gradually fades into a sandy and barren strip of desert. As you cross this broad strip of sand, there rises before you a double range of hills, stretching on the West to the Mediterranean Sea, and on the East sloping down into the Arabian Desert. The higher and further range is composed of limestone rocks and downs; the lower and nearer range of red sandstone. This nearer range forms one of the most striking and picturesque scenes in Syria. The hills run to about two thousand feet in height. The friable stone of which they consist is all worn and split into deep seams, abrupt chasms, precipitous ravines; while the broad rock-ledges are covered with a fertile soil, very prolific in grain and wild flowers. Travellers vie with each other in describing the profuse and gorgeous colours of these rocks, the beauty and fertility of the soil into which they crumble. You walk, they tell us, on sweet rich grass sprinkled with flowers, or on broad level platforms sprouting with corn, amid rock-terraces whose sides glow with deep crimson hues, streaked and suffused with purple and indigo and orange. All the epithets of wonder

and admiration have been expended on the rich colouring of these red hills, the effect of which is no doubt enhanced by the background of white limestone cliffs and pale yellow downs which rises beyond and above them. Amid their chasms and ravines lie the caves and deserted rock-temples of Petra. The whole range has two names in Scripture, both taken from its characteristic features. The more ancient name, Mount Seir, or the Rugged Mount (*Seir* means "rugged"), is taken from the deep seams, the irregular ridges, the abrupt cliffs, which everywhere break up the surface; the more modern name, Edom or Idumea (Edom and Idumea are only two forms of the same Hebrew word, a word which means "red"), is taken from the prevailing colour of the rocks.

God "gave Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession."* Esau, the "red hairy" man, had the red rugged mountain-range for his home. The feud between Esau and Jacob was perpetuated by their descendants. The Edomites were "children of the sword," and their swords were always turned against Israel. Through all the vicissitudes of the Hebrew monarchy they were its foes, though, as a rule, conquered foes. And when Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem to destroy it, the Edomites joined his army, took an active part in the sack of the city and the slaughter of its defenders, and strongly urged the Babylonians to "raze it, raze it even to the foundation thereof."† So that, if the first part of Isaac's prophetic "blessing" ‡ on Esau—"the elder shall serve the younger"—was fulfilled in the long subjection of the Edomites to the kings of Israel, the second part of it was also fulfilled—"It shall come to pass that, when *thou* shalt have the dominion, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck." It was the memory of this long strife, and of the cruel haste of Edom

* Deut. ii. 5. † Psalm cxxxvii. 7; Obadiah v. 14. ‡ Gen. xxvii. 40.

to destroy Israel, which led the later prophets to denounce so many woes on the inhabitants of the Red Range.* "Because," say they, "he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever;" therefore "Edom shall be a desolation; every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof."

Even this brief description of Mount Seir, and this slight allusion to the history of Edom, will help us to understand "the Oracle of Dumah." Isaiah stands in spirit on his watch-tower at Jerusalem, looking round on the adjacent lands, eager to catch any movement, any omen of change, in order that he may discover by what laws Jehovah governs the sons of men, and that he may warn the faithful of the things that will shortly come to pass. He has already seen—seen with a terror that unmans him—the great Persian host plunging into the darkness in which the city of Babylon is concealed, and issuing from it with the cry of victory.† And now, as he broods over that night of wrath and terrors, a voice—quick, urgent, imperative—accosts and arouses him. It comes from the South, across the plains, from the first range of hills beyond the Border. He who cries to him, "cries out of Seir," out of the red rugged mountains. Dean Stanley even thinks that he may have seen the very spot from which the cry issued. In advance of the Red Range there stands a lofty isolated rock with an excavated cave on its Judean front, intended apparently for a sentinel; and from this "cave of the sentinel," he thinks it not improbable the Edomite watchman cried across to the watchman of Jerusalem, or that at least this is the scene suggested by Isaiah's poem.

* Amos i. 11, 12; Jer. xlix. 7-18; Obadiah 1-21.

† Isaiah xxi. 1-10. See Essay xv.

For of course we are not to take Isaiah's words literally. No voice, no sound, could reach from Mount Seir to Mount Zion. Nor are we to suppose that the Edomites despatched an embassy to the Prophet at Jerusalem to inquire of him concerning the future fate of Edom. Isaiah was a poet, and describes in a dramatic form the thoughts and questions which rose in his soul as he looked through the ages and the shadows of coming events passed before him. He had already seen that the Babylonians would conquer Jerusalem; and that they, in their turn, would be conquered by the Persians. But when the Babylonians came against Jerusalem, *the Edomites* would join them in despoiling the city and slaying its inhabitants. If the Babylonians were to be judged for their sin against Israel and the God of Israel, were the Edomites, who had shared their sin, to escape their judgment? Were the very bitterest and most unrelenting foes of the holy people to go scot-free? These were questions which would very naturally arise in his mind—questions to which he would long to get an answer, but to which, as we shall see, he could obtain no very definite reply. Instead of telling us in so many words that these thoughts and inquiries were suggested to him as he considered the future, Isaiah uses the license of the poet and conveys his thoughts to us in dramatic and imaginative forms. He represents himself as standing on a lofty tower, like a watchman who abides at his post day and night. As he watches, he hears a voice; one cries to him out of Mount Seir, and asks how it will go with Edom in times to be; and as the Prophet, with all his questioning, has no clear light on the future fate of Edom, he returns an obscure and enigmatical reply. So long as we remember that the Prophet is giving poetical expression to his own thoughts and anticipations, their poetical form will only serve to make them more vivid and intense to our minds:

but if we once forget *that*, if we take his poetry as narrative, and read it in a literal way, we shall forthwith be plunged into absurdities and contradictions.

The Prophet then longs to know what the fate of Edom is to be, what doom is to overtake it for its sins. And this longing he expresses under the form of a sentinel standing on the rock of Edom, and demanding of him, "Watchman, how far is it in the night? Watchman, how far in the night?"

It is worth while to point out—for the quality of poetry depends on such minute touches of art—that the sentinel not only repeats his question, but repeats it in an abbreviated form. "Watchman, *how far is it in the night?* Watchman, *how far in the night?*" expresses in English the Hebrew abbreviation, though in the Hebrew it is much more telling.* And both the repetition of the question and the more brief and winged form of the question on the second utterance of it indicate the extreme urgency of the inquiry, the extreme haste and impatience of the inquirer. He speaks as men speak when they are driven by the stress of a great danger, or an overmastering anxiety, when every moment is precious and not a word must be wasted.

And of course what he wants to know is, not, as our Authorised Version suggests, exactly what hour and minute of the night it is, or what sort of night it promises to be, but whether the night is nearly over, whether the darkness will soon be gone. His question is not, "Watchman, *what* of the night?"—*i.e.*, what is the night like, or what hour of the night is it,—but "*how far* is it in the night?" how far has it gone? how nearly is it over? Just as a man, sick and sleepless in his bed, or lost in a dangerous district, or tossing on a wreck, longs for the morning, so the Edomite

* The Hebrew runs thus: "*Shomer, mah-milla'-lâh? Shomer, mah-millêl?*"

inquirer longs to have done with darkness and to behold the dawn.

The precise historic period to which this question points it is impossible to determine; and, indeed, its date is of little moment. From the days of Isaiah till the Mahomedans converted Mount Seir into a desolation, that is to say, for fourteen hundred years, there was hardly a period in their history which was not clouded with darkness. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Nabathæans, the Greeks, the Jews under the Maccabees, the Romans, the Crusaders, the Mahomedans have each conquered them in turn, and reduced them to an abject bondage, the last leaving their cities heaps of ruins, their fertile cornlands a mere jungle of wild flowers and weeds. From the time of Isaiah onward, these sons of the bold Esau, these brave "children of the sword," have sat in thick darkness, longing for a freedom never granted them, and still sighing, "How far is it in the night? how far in the night?"

Had the Prophet no comfort to give them? Not much; nor, I think, did he much care to comfort them. Neighbours and brothers, the Edomites and the Israelites hated each other as only brothers and neighbours can hate. And Isaiah was an Israelite. Probably he longed to see the indignation of God descend and consume them, and had no doubt that it would be a most righteous indignation. Elsewhere,* and not without a certain tone of exultation, he describes that indignation as falling on the guilty race. He represents Jehovah as calling them "the people of my ban;" he describes the sword of Jehovah as drinking their blood till it is drunken as with wine. The mountain streams are turned into pitch, the dust of the crumbling rock into brimstone; both are fired, and the fire is not quenched day nor night, but its smoke goes up for ever.

* Isaiah xxxiii. 5-17.

The palaces of Edom break out into thorns, its temples into nettles and thistles. Where nobles and princes once congregated, the raven dwells with the owl, the pelican with the hedgehog, the marten with the jackall ; its streets, once full of vivid and intense life, are haunted only by wood-devils and afreets, and all the doleful company of the popular superstitions. For a people who deserved a fate so miserable, or whom Isaiah thought to deserve it, he has little consolation. As yet, indeed, he does not clearly foresee what forms the Divine judgment will take, or how long it will endure ; all he can see is that, if beams of brightness shine upon them, they will soon be obscured. To the Edomite inquiry, "How far in the night?" the Watchman replies only, "*Morning cometh, and also night. If ye will inquire, inquire. Return : come again.*" The night of *Israel's* darkness is to have a bright and enduring morning. *They* are the people of the morning-land ; unbroken eternal day awaits *them*. But it is not thus with Edom. They may have glimpses of morning, dawns rosy with hope. They may conquer, as they afterwards did, the southern cities of Judea ; they may, as they did, subdue the Amalekites. They may, in the persons of the Herods, Princes of Idumea, usurp the throne of David, and seem to have all things at their feet. But if the morning comes to them, so also will the night. They will never be suffered to "continue in one stay." They are to be the mere slaves of change, and every change will further weaken and degrade them. The brighter the morning of their hopes, the briefer it will be, and the darker the night to which it will lead ; until, at last, every gleam of hope will have faded out of their heaven, and final utter darkness will "devour them up."

Is there any sign of relenting, any tone of gracious warning in the closing words of the Oracle ?—

"If ye will inquire, inquire.
Return : come again."

I do not know. I am not sure. I am fain to believe that as, in thought, the Prophet dismissed the Edomite inquirer with a prediction so gloomy, he felt some ruth, some compunction. Was it inevitable that their night should be without a morning? was it certain even? No; it was neither certain nor inevitable. The Prophet cannot see beyond that night; but there might, nevertheless, be some promise of good beyond it, even for the Edomites. And therefore they might return and repeat their inquiries. Might? Nay, the Prophet hopes they will. He repeats his invitation, makes it more warm and urgent. "If ye will inquire, ye may," grows into the supplicatory, "*Return : come again.*" In that "Return, come again," there may even be, as some of the Commentators suppose there is, "a significant though ambiguous hint," a hint that if the Edomites "return" to God, if they "come again" to his Temple and Prophet, because they believe what they have already heard; if they forsake their idols,* "the gods of the children of Seir," their night may yet know a morning of gladness, and the morning usher in a day of perpetual peace.

In simple prose, then, the Oracle of Dumah comes to this: Isaiah, looking onward to the future, longs to know what destiny awaits the Edomites. But the vision is not clear. All he can see is that the gleams of light which shine upon them will soon be swallowed up in darkness. He cannot contemplate their doom without a pang, and therefore he resolves to keep them in mind. By-and-by he may see their future more clearly, and see it in brighter colours. Perhaps, also, he has a faint hope that by repentance they may avert the Divine judgment, and secure a

* 2 Chron. xxv. 14, 15, 20; and Josephus, *Ant.* xv. 17, § 9.

happier destiny. These are the facts and feelings he has to express. But, instead of putting them into direct prosaic words, he suffers his imagination to transfigure them and gives them a dramatic form. He stands on his high tower, surveying the nations which surround his native land. Looking through the ages, he sees what is coming upon them. A voice—urgent, piercing, passionate with suspense—cries to him from the red range of Seir, "Watchman, is the night well-nigh gone? well-nigh gone?" And he replies, "A morning comes, but it will soon darken into a night whose end I cannot see. I may yet see it. Come again. Ask again. And Jehovah, return also to Him, that He may return to you, and send you a fair happy day." On the whole, I do not think the poem loses its sublimity by losing its mystery. It rather gains, now that we understand the impressive dialogue to have been carried on between the Edomite sentinel on his red rugged rock and the Prophet on his watch-tower at Jerusalem; now we understand that even the sentinel and the watchmen are only dramatic figures through which we behold the longings and anticipations, the alternate hopes and fears, of Isaiah's soul.

And, now, may we not take this impressive dialogue as setting forth the Divine Providence, which bends over *us* and *our* relation to it? How often, stung by many miseries, sick with many fears, our despondent hearts dwelling in great darkness and the shadow of death, do we lift wistful eyes to heaven, to Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps, and cry, "O Lord, how far is it in the night? how far in the night? Is the darkness almost gone and the day at hand? Or are we never to be redeemed from our weakness and our sorrow? Are we always to be thus, sinful and ashamed of our sins, bemoaning the bad habits we loathe

and yet cannot renounce, foreboding a loss we are not strong enough to bear, fearing a death we are not pure enough to meet? Is there no hope for us here or hereafter? Are we to sit in gross shadows till we pass into the 'land of obscurity, dark as the shadow of death, where there is no order, and the very light is darkness?'"

How often do the heavens seem pitiless, and send no answer to our impassioned appeal, but "Morning cometh, and also night?" However sad we are, however racked with suspense, though we have lost the friends we most loved, or apprehend the ill we most fear, the sun shines on, the birds sing, our friends eat and drink and are merry, we have to do our work, to take our food, to talk and smile, to listen to condolences, to endure remonstrance, to go through the whole daily round as though nothing had happened to us. And when the day is over, the night comes, and we have to lie down on a couch which has no rest for us, to drag through the slow weary hours, and long for the morning. At such times, in such moods, our life grows very dark to us. Nature seems to have no sympathy with us; friends and neighbours cannot even understand what our grief is like; our duties are burdensome to us, pleasure even more burdensome than duty. The strain is heavier than we can endure; it seems impossible that we should struggle on long under a burden so heavy. And yet the future holds out no hope to us but death. A few faint watery gleams of brightness, and then the great darkness will rush down upon us, the night that has no end.

This dull despairing mood can hardly be unknown to any who have passed the bounds of youth. When shall we learn that through this very mood God is speaking to us, bidding us cease from our idols, purging us from an undue love of whatever comes between our souls and Him? He brings this horror of great darkness over us that we, deaf

for the time to the world, may listen for his voice, and listening, may hear Him say, "If ye will inquire, inquire. Return : come again. My throne is always open to you. You may come to Me as often as you will, and the oftener you come, the lighter and more peaceful will be your hearts. Only return and come, renouncing all self-trust and trust in man, and your darkest night shall turn to brightest day." Whether Isaiah had, or had not, any such gracious thoughts for the Edomites, we cannot doubt that God our Father is full of grace and tenderness for us, and for all men. There is no night with Him, and there will be no night for us when once we are at one with Him ; no night, but only clear eternal day.

XVII.

The Parable of the Sower.*

"Take heed *what* ye hear."—ST. MATTHEW.

"Take heed *how* ye hear."—ST. LUKE.

WHEN the Lord Jesus laid aside the glories and splendours which He had with the Father before the world was, He doffed the robes of a king to put on the weeds of the husbandman, and went forth to endure heat and frost, rain and wild weather, that He might sow the quickening seeds of truth through that great field, the world. He was "the Sower who went forth to sow;" and all who now speak the Word do but scatter seed which they have found in his garner or caught from his bountiful hand. And He, like them, often laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought. Like them, He found that there was a curse upon the ground, that thorns and thistles sprang up in it, that the rock lay very near the surface; that the soil was here sterile, and there yielded only a brief unfulfilled promise of fertility; that in this great field, and beneath this world's unkindly weather, no fruit could be brought to perfection save by much labour and after many disappointments. As we read this parable, indeed, we might very well interpret it as a prophetic lamentation over his unproductive toils and defeated hopes. We might say, "There are but four kinds of soil in the field; and, of the four, three

* St. Matthew xiii. 3—23. St. Mark iv. 3—20. St. Luke viii. 5—15.

are bad and only one good." Such an interpretation would very well accord with the pensive, almost despairing, mood which is common in the Church just now, and which slackens the zeal of many. I would remind those who are disposed to interpret the parable thus of what has been too much overlooked; viz., that if there are three kinds of unproductive soil in the field, there are also three kinds of productive soil. If some of the seed falls by the side of the path, other falls on ground good enough to yield thirty-fold; if some falls on rocky places, other falls on the better ground which yields sixty-fold; if some falls among thorns, other falls on that best ground which yields a hundred-fold. And every year the Great Husbandman is improving his estate, digging about it and manuring it, rooting out the weeds, deepening the soil, ploughing up the trodden paths, and bringing a larger breadth of land into yield. Every year the garner grows fuller, and there is more seed-corn ready for the sower's hand. Every year there are more sowers who go forth to sow on all soils and beside all waters. Do not despair of the world, then, nor of your labours to mend and benefit the world. "Sow thy seed in the morning, and stay not thy hand in the evening, since thou knowest not which shall prosper, this or that, or whether both shall prove good: so shall the light be sweet to thee, and it shall be pleasant to thine eyes to behold the sun."

In the two sentences placed as mottoes to this Essay, we have the moral which Christ Himself drew from that parable of the Sower with which, of all his parables, we are probably most familiar. And it is both curious and instructive to note that his moral, which is the natural moral and was drawn by a divine wisdom, nevertheless indicates, not the force and beauty of the parable, but the weakness and insufficiency of the most perfect parabolic forms of instruction. Different hearers of the Word are compared to different

kinds of soil. The comparison runs very clear, and is full of charming and profound analogies. Yet, when our Lord would sum up the moral lessons of the parable, the comparison altogether fails. We are to be careful as to what we hear and how we hear it; but how can the ground exercise any care as to what seed it will receive, or as to the conditions into which it will receive it? It must take whatever seed the sower casts upon it; and if the good seed should be choked by thorns or fail for lack of soil, the ground is not to blame for that; its conditions depend not on its own but on the husbandman's care. It is *he* who should have burned off the thorns, or gathered out the stones, or added the necessary soil; it is *he* who is to blame if the wrong seed be sown, or the ground yield no fruit.

Thus, from the very first parable uttered by our Lord, we learn that we must not push his analogies and comparisons too far; that natural phenomena and processes are inadequate expressions of spiritual truth; that we must bring an understanding and discriminating heart even to the most perfect words ever uttered. To give its full force to the moral of this parable, we must supplement the parable. We must remember that different hearers of the Word are not only like divers soils, but also like divers husbandmen; we must remember that just as the husbandman by skill and assiduity may compel the ground to bring forth, despite the curse which has fallen upon it, so we by a wise assiduity may constrain these sterile hearts of ours to bring forth fruit unto God. We *can* determine what seed we will receive into our hearts; and, therefore, we are to see to it that we receive only the good seed of the kingdom, not the tares which the enemy will only be too happy to scatter on them, if we permit him. We *can* determine the conditions of the soil into which the seed is to fall; and, therefore, we are to see to it that there be a good soil for the good

seed, a soil rich enough and deep enough to bring it to perfection.

"Take heed *what* ye hear," *i.e.*, Take good care that you hear the very word of God : "Take heed *how* ye hear," *i.e.*, Take good care that you hear not the word of God in vain. The first injunction means, Be sure you get the truth ; and the second, Be sure you obey the truth.

I. First, then, we are to "*take heed what we hear ;*" to be sure that we get the very truth of God.

Now, as I need hardly say, we are being taught every day, and all day long. The air is full of seeds, and they are for ever falling on the ground. Every word we hear, every thought kindled in us by what we see our neighbour do, or by the duties we discharge, or by the books we read, has a moral complexion and effect ; it either strengthens us in our love of that which is good and right, or weakens it. And with all these seeds floating in the air, we need to be very careful where they fall ; very careful that, if they be evil seeds, we do not suffer them to light on our field. *Very* careful, because the seeds of the tare, or zizanium, which is a bastard corn, are often so like those of wheat, and some forms of evil so nearly resemble certain forms of good, that we can hardly distinguish the one from the other. *Very* careful, for if we once suffer these evil seeds to take root within us, we shall have to pluck them up by-and-by, and shall not only have wasted labour and strength upon them, but shall also have to endure the pain of the wrench, and to leave a bare barren spot which will not easily grow fertile again.

But though this anxious care over the daily influences of good and evil which visit us may fairly be included in our Saviour's warning, there can be little doubt that its main allusion is to our choice of direct and definite instruction in

spiritual things. He had been teaching a people who had many teachers besides Him—teachers who, for the most part, made void the commandment of God with their vain traditions. And, as yet, the people listened even to Him rather because He fed them than because He taught them, because He wrought miracles rather than because He revealed truth. The loaves and fishes were more agreeable to them than parables and warnings, though I daresay they thought the parables very pretty, and the warnings very solemn and weighty. Hence He admonishes them that their first question about any religious teacher should be, “*What* does he teach? Is it the truth of God?” not “What shall we get by listening to him?” or “Has he a charming style?” or “Does he use novel and eccentric forms of speech?”

And, indeed, one can hardly say that all need for this warning has gone by. There are still many who select their religious teacher, not mainly because he expounds the word of God and brings it home to the conscience and heart; many who, like the Athenians of old, are engrossed by the desire “to hear some new thing;” many who, like the elder Hebrews, prefer a prophet who is to them “as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument.” Oratorical purple and fine linen is more to them than Truth in simple weeds. Of course, the demand has created a supply; and all through the land we may find men on the strain to be original, and who think themselves very deep when they are only muddy; or men who affect the popular orator, and load their speech with purple patches of rhetoric, or twist it into eccentricities and vulgarities alluring to dull and vulgar minds: in short, men whose main ambition is to shine, and to succeed, rather than to teach what truth God has given them to know.

There is still need, therefore, to repeat the warning, “Take heed to *what* you hear.” Make it your supreme aim

to get the truth. Let, "*What* does he sow?" be your first question; not, "*How* does he sow it?"

With horny hand and clownish gesture the husbandman scatters the seed-corn upon the soil; would he reap a heavier crop if you were to find him in kid gloves, and teach him to wave his hand with flowing grace? A dandy husbandman would be a startling phenomenon in the agricultural world, though in the ecclesiastical world you may meet him often enough, and too often.

Are we, then, to prefer an unstudied and slovenly proclamation of the truth? By no means. If the preacher be wise, he will search out and set in order words that shall be acceptable, yet words of truth and life; he will press into his service all his powers of wit, humour, argument, tenderness; he will seek to dip the arrows of conviction in healing balms, to bend the bow of hope above the waters of penitence, to carry guiding and comfortable rays into the darkness of doubt or grief, to rebuke successful wrong with an indignation that shall burn like a fire, and to lift up patient unsuccessful merit from the dust by force of sympathy and love. He will consecrate all his faculties and energies to the service of his Master, to the endeavour to carry the very truth to the hearts of his brethren. But the defence and exposition of the truth will be his supreme aim. He will care more for *what* he teaches than for *how* he teaches it.

And we—we are to care more for the good seed than for the manner in which it is sown. To acquire a complete knowledge of the truth—this should be our chief aim and desire, as, indeed, of all who profess and call themselves Christians. "Am I growing into a further acquaintance with the Divine Word? do I understand it better, read it with a more intelligent method, find old difficulties disappearing, and new beauties claiming my regard? does it shed a fuller light of guidance on the perplexities of my daily path,

and a fuller light of hope across the darkness of my sorrows? am I learning to drink in more of its spirit and to give out more of its spirit?"—this is the main question with all who "take heed to *what* they hear."

II. We are to take heed "*how we hear*;" to be sure that we obey the truth.

In the parable we have a description of three unproductive soils, of three kinds of hearers who are none the better for what they hear, but rather the worse. I will try to bring out the characteristics of these unprofitable hearers by-and-by. For the present let us confine our thoughts to the Good Hearer, the model hearer, described by our Lord, and endeavour to form some conception of him.

Each of the Evangelists will help us; for St. Matthew tells us that "he that receiveth seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word and *understandeth* it;" St. Mark, that it is he "who heareth the word and *receiveth* it;" and St. Luke, that it is he who, "having heard the word," "*keepeth it in an honest and good heart*, and bringeth forth fruit with patience."

1. The first characteristic of the good hearer is that "he *understands* the word." Now the Greek verb here rendered "understand" is very significant. It denotes a state of mind in which, having compared one statement with another, having weighed each apart, and then placed them side by side, having viewed the truth as truth, and then in its relation to himself, a man gives it the assent of his whole intelligent nature, and affirms that it is true and shall be true for him; that he believes it, and will act upon it. It includes the assent of the reason, and the determination of the will; and the sympathy of the heart. So that the very first characteristic of the good hearer of the Divine Word is a very large and comprehensive one. Before you can claim to be such

a hearer, you must have studied and considered the truth as it is in Jesus, and have weighed any objections to it of which you are cognizant, and found them wanting. You must have felt its adaptation to the needs of such a creature as you are, placed in such a world as this. You must have decided that it is from God; that it is for you. Not only must your reason consent to it as true, you must also determine to act upon it, and find your sympathies and affections engaged by it. This done, you will have the first qualification of the good hearer; for we hear nothing to the best advantage while we doubt it, or dislike it, or do not mean to let it influence our life. It is only when we listen in faith, in love, and with a resolve to benefit by what we hear, that we are in a condition to make the most of the Divine Word, and to get the most from it.

2. St. Mark's word is equally significant with St. Matthew's, and carries the thought still farther; for to "*receive*," in Mark's sense of the word, is "to take into one's-self." It implies that the good hearer is so charmed and won by the manifold adaptations of the divine truth to his needs, so touched and penetrated by it, that "with joy he embraceth it," receives it into his inner life, and suffers it to become part of his very being: he prepares, so to speak, a habitation, a sanctuary for it in the inmost recesses of his spirit, from which, like the Shekinah in the Temple, it sheds a hallowing and enlightening influence through all the courts of his soul. So that the model hearer not only understands the Word, not only gives it the sanction of his intelligence and will and affection, but, in virtue of this sanction, admits it into himself, suffers it to dwell in him, to become part of him, to become the guiding and shaping spirit of his life; insomuch, that he acts out its dictates as by instinct, has no need elaborately and distrustfully to argue them out, but at once recognizes them

as both his law and his choice. And, indeed, we are masters of no branch of learning, nor even proficient in it, nay, we cannot even study it to full advantage, until its axioms, its rudimentary principles, its governing spirit have become in this sense *one with us*—until we recognize and obey them as by instinct. The successful farmer or merchant, for instance, knows a great deal more than he can put into words, or than he has learned from words, and often acts in a way for which he could give no adequate reasons. The one knows as by instinct what crop will suit a certain soil, or what cross will give him the best breed, or what manure to put upon a certain field; while the other instinctively recognizes good and bad investments, will not put his money into what looks a very promising speculation, and will put it into what an outsider suspects. Neither the one nor the other could always give you his reasons, nor describe the process by which he arrived at his conclusions. They act from an instinct which has grown up from long experience and a half-unconscious observation of the facts and laws by which they are affected. Yet would not these men make the very best and most appreciative of hearers, were a friend very wise in agriculture or in the secrets of the money-market to speak? Would not they see infinitely farther into his meaning than one whose knowledge was gathered only from books, and had never been assimilated into his very being like a daily food? Well, it is thus with the hearers of the Inspired Word. *They* are the good hearers, the best hearers, who have had a daily experience of its truths, who have received it into themselves, of whose spiritual nature it has become part, in whom it works with an instinctive accuracy and constancy; so that they do not need to consider what is right and wrong, or to argue about it, but know the right from the wrong with a certainty beyond the reach of logic. Speak the Word of God to

them, and it is full of meaning—full of meanings deeper and more subtle than others can see; for they have long since not only “understood,” but “received,” the Word into their heart of hearts.

3. But St. Luke warns us that, in the good hearer, this heart into which the Word is received will be “*a good and honest heart*,” *i.e.*, a heart sincere and earnest. Happily for us, the Word of God may dwell, amid many obstructions, even in a false and insincere heart. Jacob was not honest, yet the Word of God dwelt in him till it made him honest; and, if we love the truth, the truth will come to us and find us out, even though there be much in us that is subtle and untrue. Only, it will come to make us true; come, therefore, to inflict much pain upon us, to excite an inward struggle and conflict in which we shall often suffer wounds and defeat. And, obviously, a man with an untrue heart will not make a good hearer of the truth. It will have so much to rebuke and overcome in him, that he will not be sufficiently at leisure from himself to study its larger aspects; it will meet with such frequent disobediences, that it will not be able to confer the insight and breadth of view which spring from obedience. Jacob was, for the most part, a very bad hearer of the Word, simply because he was false and insincere. He heard, for instance, that God had selected him, although he was the younger son, as heir to his father—heir, therefore, to “the promise.” He quite “understood” that word; he “received” it into his heart; it became part of his very life—gave shape to his actions, his ambitions, his desires. But, because that word was received into a false dishonest heart, it set him plotting how to cheat his brother Esau of his birthright, and Isaac his father of his blessing. He was not a good, but a bad, hearer of the Word. Through his false handling of it, it moved him to lie and cheat, instead

of being his strongest motive to truth and godliness. And we cannot be good hearers until our hearts become "good," *i.e.*, candid and sincere. If we would know the secrets of truth, we must become unselfish and unprejudiced; we must care rather to be on the side of truth than to find the truth on our side. A sincere earnestness, uncomplicated and undiverted by other aims, will commonly reach its aim. The man who with single undivided purpose wills to become rich, will commonly grow rich; the man who wills to succeed in life, and is not to be diverted from his aim by any indolent cravings after self-indulgence, or any desire to become noble, or cultured, or happy, will, as a rule, succeed: and in like manner, the Christian who sets his heart on becoming rich in heavenly wisdom and the gifts of grace, and keeps that resolve in a heart not to be diverted from its quest, will surely achieve his resolve. The seeds of humility, purity, charity, knowledge, and understanding, falling in that pure soil—a soil cleansed from all noxious weeds—will spring up into a wealthy harvest.

4. Having received the Word into an honest heart, he will "*keep*," or "*hold it fast*." He will not let it go, whatever allurements or oppositions he may meet. He will not suffer the good seed to be withered by wayside influences, nor choked by the incoming cares or pleasures of life, nor obstructed by rocky impenitences. He has found it hard to get the truth; and, having got it, he will not part with it. At times, it may be very difficult to hold it fast. A great gain or an intense delight may be purchasable at a small cost of conviction; a terrible danger may be averted by a lie; a friend may be made happy by a slight deviation from the path of integrity: but he will hold fast his integrity and truth. He will be assured that the laws which he has deduced from the Word, the laws by which

he commonly governs his life, must not be reconsidered, much less repealed, while the storm of passionate desire is beating upon him; that then, most of all, he needs to abide by them. This is the good hearer—the man who is a doer of the Word, and a doer when doing is most difficult, not a hearer only. He never forgets what manner of man he is, or should be; but, looking with a constant gaze into the perfect law of our liberty, walks by it, and is blessed in his deed.

Alas! what a rebuke is this good hearer to us, who, in our inconstancy, have a thousand gracious impulses which we never carry out; who are always being moved to the discharge of duties which we seldom carry through; who are again and again moved to a solemn and entire dedication of ourselves to Him who is the truth, and yet are as fitful and unstable in our allegiance as though we had received no inspiration from on high!

5. The good hearer who understands the Word, receives it into a good and honest heart, and holds it fast, also “brings forth fruit *with patience*.” And of all his characteristics this, as it is the most valuable, so also is it the hardest to attain. To *wait* is even harder than to labour and to obey. Unless we are to have our harvest very soon, we have hardly the heart to sow. The husbandman has long patience—must have it—till he receives the early and the latter rain. “The winter frost must mellow the seed lying in the genial bosom of the earth; the rains of spring must swell it, and the suns of summer mature it.” So with us. To become a good hearer, *i.e.*, a good doer of the Word, is a task which requires long patience. We must suffer many a killing frost, many a darkening shower, many a burning sun, before the good seed cast into our heart by that great Sower who daily goes forth to sow will gladden us with its thirty, or sixty, or hundred-fold. But

the longer we wait, the more precious will be our harvest—it is only ill weeds that spring up apace—and the sweeter the taste of the bread which has been so hardly earned and so long in coming. It is so in the world around us, in which “always there is seed being sown silently and unseen, and everywhere there come sweet flowers without our foresight or labour. We reap what we sow, but Nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours.” And God is not unjust that He should forget our labour of love. We shall reap all that we have sown, and more than we sowed. For “He that giveth seed to the husbandman, and bread to the eater,” will “multiply” the seed we have sown, and give us to eat of the fruit of our toils. Let us be patient, therefore, let us be steadfast, and stablish our hearts before Him.

III. But we must now speak of the Unprofitable Hearers of the Word—of the unproductive soils: of which three kinds are placed before us in the parable, *their* characteristics being, for the most part, in direct opposition to those of the good ground—of the profitable hearer.

I. And of these three sorts of Unprofitable Hearers, the first set before us is *he to whom the Word is as seed sown by the path-side*. As the sower goes over the field, scattering the seed broadcast, some of it falls on the path, or close by the side of the path, which runs through the field—where the glebe has not been broken up by the plough,—and lies on its hard surface until it is either trodden down and crushed beneath the feet of passers-by, or is caught up by the birds which flock round the sower's heels. And this pretty familiar rural scene is thus translated into the spiritual region by our Lord Himself: “When anyone heareth the Word, and *understandeth it not*, then cometh the Evil One and

snatcheth away that which was sown in his heart, lest he should believe and be saved."

Now, observe, the soil of the path and under the path may be as deep and rich as the best of the field ; its natural capacity for yielding fruit may be very large ; but it has been trodden hard by many passing feet, so that the seed cannot penetrate the surface, but lies there an easy prey to the birds ; only rotting, not growing, even should it escape their keen eyes and the bruise of the passing heel. The first unprofitable hearer, therefore, is not a man of a cold, hard nature, nor of a nature all overrun with growths of evil ; he is simply negligent and uninterested. Unlike the good hearer, he does not *understand* the Word—*i.e.*, he does not perceive its bearing on himself, its true worth and importance to him ; he does not weigh, and ponder, and approve it, does not give it the assent of his whole intelligent nature, does not conclude that it is true and shall be true for him. He has no objection to listen to it, but it does not penetrate to the depths of his being ; it excites no personal interest, does not throw out slight root-filaments on every side to twine round the thoughts and affections which lie closest to his heart. He conceives of religion as a useful social safeguard, a moral police, a decency of life, a bulwark of established institutions, a charming occupation for romantic women, a welcome opiate for the suffering, a beneficial restraint upon the poor ; but not as the one supreme question and interest for men of all sorts and conditions. The Church does not lay hold of him, though he attends its services, as the market does, or the home. The Bible, though he reads it—at least in public—does not touch him so nearly as the newspaper or the ledger. Speak to him of sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come, and he will listen with courteous deference, will catch your phrases, perhaps, and repeat them, and hold them to be his creed

but you do not touch and move him as when you tell him that cotton is going up, or that coals are cheaper, or that there is a short supply of wheat, or that there is a growing demand for lace. The link between the Word and his life is somehow lacking, although it is often only a *single* link that seems wanting. The facts, truths, laws of the invisible spiritual world have no vital interest or relation for him; their electric currents do not pass to him and stimulate him to holy thought and action. And yet, you cannot but feel that the man has good stuff in him, if only you could get at it; that he is of a tender, devout, charitable nature, although that which is spiritual in him is undeveloped. The good seed lies there on the hard polished surface, or slips off from it, or is carried off by the next swift-winged troop of thoughts that flit by: nevertheless, you feel that if the seed were once *in* the soil, it would bear much fruit; that if he *understood* the Word, he would "believe and be saved."

How has he reached this condition? what has made him thus impervious to spiritual truth? Alas! he has made his heart a highway, has suffered *all* thoughts and desires, evil as well as good—the villain lust with its heavy tramp, and the light airy fancy floating in gossamer robes—to pass to and fro. For many a day his heart has lain open like a public thoroughfare; all base and low and sensual imaginations have claimed their right of way over it, no less than those which are pure and noble, till the soil, good enough in itself, has been trodden hard, and can no more take seed or bear fruit until the keen grinding ploughshare of affliction has been driven through it. Meantime, there are plenty of winged thoughts about to snatch up any good seed which seems disposed to lodge upon it, plenty of heavy feet to crush it.

And these thoughts need not be evil thoughts, though they be turned to an evil use, nor thoughts to which a man should altogether refuse access. The peasant passing

through the field, whose heavy boot bruises out the life of the seed, may be on his way to Church or on an errand of neighbourly duty and good will. The birds who pick it up follow a natural instinct, and are not thieves though they steal the grain. The fault is not with them ; but in the want of true vital relation between the soil and the seed. If the seed were *in* the ground, where it should be, instead of *on* it, no foot of peasant, no hungry bird, could harm it. And if the Divine Word were in the hearer's heart, instead of outside it, no external impression could injure or remove it. As it is, it lies at the mercy of any, even the most natural and innocent, succeeding impression. He has *felt* the Word fall upon his heart, perchance, hard though it be ; he has dimly and from afar apprehended that there is a life, a reality, in the truth of God which he has not hitherto recognized ; and he has thought, as he listened, that it will be well for him to look into the matter for himself some day : but the sermon over, the organ begins to play, and the sweet innocent music, with its new impressions, carries off part of the impression previously made. Then follow neighbourly salutes and inquiries, a pleasant walk or chat, and by dinner-time the good thought is gone. The man has been so accustomed to let all kinds of impressions come and go, that he feels rather relieved when *this* has taken flight ; and so he goes on and on, a perfectly honest amiable fellow whom everybody likes, meaning no harm, yet doing this great harm,—that he is not only hardening his own spiritual nature and frittering away its strength, not only preparing sharp pangs for himself in the future, but helping to keep the world at a low unspiritual level of life, and hanging, like a retarding clod, on the chariot-wheels of the Divine King.

2. The second Unprofitable Hearer is *he to whom the Word is as seed sown in rocky places*. In the great field in

which the sower goes forth bearing precious seed, there are places in which the hard rock crops up close to the surface ; and the seed which falls into the shallow soil that covers the face of the rock, springs up very quickly in the heat which the rock holds and radiates : but because there is little moisture and no depth of earth, the sun scorches them, and they wither as quickly as they grew. And, says the Lord Jesus, translating these familiar natural symbols into spiritual truths, "He that receiveth the Word into rocky places is he who heareth the Word, and at once with joy *receiveth* it, yet he hath no root in himself, but changeth with the changing time : he believeth for a while, but in time of temptation, he standeth aloof ; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth, immediately he is offended."

This second hearer, then, is a man of shallow superficial character, such as we often meet ; a man of no depth or earnestness, who does nothing thoroughly, brings nothing to perfection.

And that, surely, is a very true touch which describes a man of this superficial stamp as being of a hard and impenetrable heart. Under the light thin surface of easily stirred dust there lies a bed of rock. For it *is* among those who lead a life of light enjoyment, who are easily moved, very sensitive to the impact of circumstance, and who tread a round of trivial cares and ambitions and pleasures, that we learn how heartless men can be. It is not among the poor, or the busy, but among the elegant votaries of pleasure and fashion, that men—ay, and women too—are trained to stifle emotion, to discard enthusiasm and dread it, to harden themselves into indifference, to cultivate that selfishness which is the death of all love and all nobility.*

* For the thought, and for some of the expressions, of this paragraph, I am indebted to Robertson's fine discourse on "The Parable of the Sower." See "Robertson's Sermons," First Series.

And when a man of this sensitive yet shallow character has the Word of God earnestly pressed upon him, it often happens that, struck by its novelty and moved by the passion of the moment, he forthwith "receives it with joy;" not only understands and assents to it, but, like the good hearer, *receives* it into himself, suffers it to dwell and work in him, and shape his course. For awhile his life is changed; he is eager to give his susceptible and easily-moved heart altogether to this new stimulating excitement. Nothing in his experience was ever comparable to it. He will break through all rules of decorum and good sense to shew his esteem for it, and to make others esteem it as he does. He lives in a rapture, and would have all men share it with him.

But, like all other raptures, it is quickly past, its force is soon spent. The times change, and he changes with the time. He has no root in himself, and cannot withstand any influence that is brought to bear upon him. A strong temptation comes, and he has no strong faith with which to meet it. The excitement is over, and now the religious life looks as dreary to him as all previous forms of life had looked. "Tribulation or persecution ariseth, and immediately he is offended." He does not "keep" the Word; his nerveless hands cannot hold it fast. As quickly as he received it, so quickly he lets it go. When it was novel, full of untasted pleasurable excitements, full too of gracious promises and hopes for the future, he was charmed with it; now that it brings loss, self-denial, inward strife, pain, and reproach—why should he cling to it? Just as the heat of the sun, which makes the good deep soil fruitful, scorches up the quick-springing seed that lies upon the rock, so the very tribulation which would have matured the growth of the good hearer, working in him experience and patience and hope, destroys the faith of the insincere and heartless

hearer of the Word. "The blessing of the New Testament" is his bane.* All he ever really cared for was himself—his own excitements and gratifications; and when the Word demands that this base self of his should be laid on the altar or stretched on the cross, he starts back in dismay, he stands aloof, he is offended. He liked that the sun should shine upon him, but that it should shine upon him "with a *burning* heat," that it should become "a consuming fire" to his selfishness and sin, this was more than he bargained for, more than he will brook. And so the good seed, which sprang up so quickly and hopefully, perishes for want of depth, for want of root.

Is not this description true to experience—to our experience of other men, perhaps even of ourselves? Do we not perpetually see men of a light facile nature catch excitement from their excited neighbours, and strain themselves into a sudden maturity of religious speech and service under the heat and pressure of a religious, or even irreligious, revival, only to fall away as quickly as they came, to wither as rapidly as they sprang, to pass under the influence of some other excitement as utterly as they were moved by this? Are not these phenomena so familiar to us as to have bred a *habit* of distrust? When we see men thus carried out of and beyond themselves with sudden extreme fervours, do we not sadly forebode that their fervour will soon cool, or that in a while they will be just as ardent in their pursuit of some new stimulant? And is not our sad foreboding fulfilled in nine cases out of ten? Let us learn, then, to hold fast the Word, and to have long patience, as well as to receive it with joy. If we are of a light, susceptible,

* "*Prosperity* is the Blessing of the Old Testament; *Adversity* is the Blessing of the New; which carrieth the greater Benediction, and the clearer Revelation of God's Favour."—Lord Bacon's *Essays: Of Adversitie*.

easily-moved temperament, apt to rush into all extremes and to pursue all immediate objects with disproportionate eagerness, let us be on our guard. Let us seek the aid and grace of God. Let us welcome the hammer which breaks up the rock to deepen the soil; lest, despite our ready zeal, we should prove castaways, and find the good seed scorched and withered up while yet in the stalk.

3. The third Unprofitable Hearer is *he to whom the Word is as seed sown among thorns*. For besides the trodden paths and rocky places covered with shallow soil, there are broad patches in the field which are thick with the seeds of thorns; and these spring up with the good seed, but faster than the good seed, so that it is choked before it can yield fruit. Now if we ask, who among all the hearers of the Word answers to this thorn-infested soil? the Lord Jesus replies, "He who received seed among the thorns is he who, when he has heard the Word, goeth his way; and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of life, and the lust of other things entering in, choke the Word, and he bringeth no fruit to perfection."

Observe: the ground in this case is good enough to grow either wheat or thorns, but not good enough to grow both, *i.e.*, not good enough to bring both to perfection. Here, on this soil, the seed has a better chance than before. It gets *into* the soil, takes root, springs up, forms the ear even. It is not trodden down, nor snatched away; nor is it scorched up for want of moisture and depth. Long after the husbandman, going his rounds, has discovered that the sides of the paths will be bare, and seen the withered stalks of the seed sown on the rocky places, he hopes that this on the thorny ground is doing fairly well, though there are too many weeds among it. But when it has well-nigh accomplished its task, and its promise is at its best, it is choked

by quicker growths, and not suffered to mature the full corn in the ear.

Now it is thus with some hearers of the Word. Like the good hearer, they understand, they receive, they even hold it fast. They do not suffer the impression it has produced to fade away instantly, like seed picked up by birds the very moment it has fallen ; nor do they renounce it so soon as it demands a stout resistance to temptation, or a patient endurance of trial—like seed that, after it has sprung, withers in the stalk. They *keep* the Word through all such trials and tests as these. But, nevertheless, they suffer it to be choked when it is on the point of bearing. Much as they love it, they love much beside it ; and these other loves grow very quickly, and overtop *that*, and suck away the juices which should nourish it ; insomuch that the life and power of religion are gradually drawn out of them, and though fruit is formed in them, they do not bring it to perfection.

What, then, are the thorns which thus thwart and choke the Word? Some of them are, (1.) "*The cares of this world :*" those daily recurring anxieties about what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed, which distract our attention ; so that, while the Word of God draws us one way, these petty cares and worries draw us another way. Like Martha, we are so cumbered with anxious thought about the service of the house and the body, that we have no leisure to sit at the Master's feet, and feel aggrieved that others should sit there, instead of sharing our burden and lightening our cares. Have we not all known many men and many women—for this seems to be a special weakness in good women, and springs very naturally from their special lot and duty—the promise of whose early faith has been in much belied by excessive cares of this kind ; who have suffered these thorns

to grow so high, that the good growths of faith have been hardly visible in them, and have run great danger of being choked ?

(2.) Other of these thorns spring from "*the deceitfulness of riches*"—from the peculiar and subtle craft with which they beguile us from the simplicity that is in Christ. And though, like the cares of this world, riches are not in themselves an evil, yet all moralists, all careful observers of human life, have admitted that wealth has a special trick of gradually withdrawing men from the love and service of the truth. As a rule, rich men are content with the world as it is—naturally ; for, as they think, the world has dealt very kindly by them, and therefore they see no great need for bettering it. And then, if they hoard their money, it speedily becomes a rival with Christ in their affections ; while, if they spend it, they multiply the luxuries and enjoyments which relax their moral fibre, and dispose them to an easy toleration of much that is mean and sensual in themselves and in their neighbours. If they seek to rise in the world, to make themselves a great place and name, they must give themselves to the endeavour with a devotion which is always in danger of becoming excessive ; while, if they give themselves to philanthropy and the Church, they are caressed and flattered by the Church—ah, shame to the Church !—and the world ; the moral standards are a little lowered for their convenience—for who can judge a munificent benefactor hardly?—till at last they come to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, and value the Mammon which blesses them with so many excellent good gifts as highly as that other Master whose service they combine with his. In short, wealth has many wiles ; it is full of all deceitfulness ; and no man is worthy of profounder honour than the rich man who keeps himself unspotted, whether by world or church. The deceit-

fulness of riches is as ugly and poisonous 'a thorn as any which seek to overtop and choke the good seed.

(3.) "*The pleasures of life, and the lusts of other things,*" are more common weeds, but hardly less fatal. They ruin thousands where the deceitfulness of riches ruins one. Who that has gone through life with open eyes has not again and again seen the young man, who, while still young, gave himself ardently to the service of religion, beguiled from his simplicity by the lures of lust and pleasure? He does not suddenly and completely fall away, but first this pleasure solicits him, and then that, and among them they choke his early devotion. He must educate himself: he must be as other men are, and do as they do; he wants to excel in a game of skill, or to make a good volunteer; he must win yonder girl for his wife; he must provide for his children; he must write a book, or take out a patent, or extend his business: and all these aims and desires, innocent apart and in themselves, when combined and excessively pursued are full of peril. There is no one of them, perhaps, which, if the issue were distinctly raised, he would not sacrifice for Christ's sake; but among so many vigorous and quick-springing thorns, the good seed has but a poor chance, and seldom brings its fruit to perfection.

- Alas! of how many souls might this sad story be told! How many a fair bright promise has thus been nipped in the bud! How many a man whom Jesus might have loved, and *has* loved, has thus made shipwreck of the faith! Let us see to it, then, that we come not into their number. Let us see to it that these deadly thorns do not make us unfruitful hearers of the Word of truth and grace.

IV. But our study of this familiar parable will not be complete unless we add a few words on *the True Function of Parables*.

(1.) As the Lord Jesus sat in the boat addressing the multitude on the adjacent shore, pouring forth parable on parable, his disciples were surprised and perplexed. If in speaking to them, when they were alone with Him, He had disclosed "the mysteries of the kingdom" under the thin veil of parable and allegory, it would seem that He had not heretofore adopted the parabolic method in his discourses to the people. There is a tone of affront, perhaps, as well as of surprise, in their question, "Why speakest Thou *unto them* in parables?" the tone of men who felt that "the mysteries" were sacred to the initiated, and should not be exposed to the popular gaze.

Our Lord's reply to their question, at least as reported by two of the Evangelists, has long been recognized as one of the most painful and difficult passages in the whole range of New Testament Scripture. St. Mark* reports His answer thus: "And He said unto them, To *you* is given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to *them that are without* all things are done in parables, *that seeing, they may see and not perceive, and hearing, they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should turn and be forgiven.*" St. Luke† reports his answer in briefer yet almost identical terms: "And He said, Unto *you* it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to *the rest* in parables, *that seeing, they may not see, and hearing, they may not understand.*"

Now if we take these words as they stand, and read them in a plain honest way, they confirm that distinction between the initiated and the uninitiated which was probably in the disciples' mind; they admit that the "secrets" or "mysteries" of the kingdom of heaven were to be veiled from the world at large; they teach that in speaking to the multitude, to men in general as distinguished from his disciples, the Lord Jesus selected the parabolic form of instruction in order to

* St. Mark iv. 11, 12.

† St. Luke viii. 10.

hide the truth from them, instead of to reveal it, in order that they might *not* perceive and understand his meaning, in order that they might *not* turn from their sins and be forgiven. That is to say, *He deliberately chose a method of instruction which did not instruct, and came, not to save men, but to condemn them.*

Calvin affirms that *that* was our Lord's meaning, that He wished and "intended that his doctrine should be beneficial *only to a few.*" But let who will affirm it to have been his meaning, can we, dare we believe it? And yet how are we to escape the unwelcome impossible conclusion? The Greek gives us no help; there is no escape in that direction. In the Original Text, quite as strongly as in our Version of it, St. Luke and St. Mark assert that our Lord spake in parables, *in order that* the people might not perceive and understand the mysteries of the kingdom, in order that they might not be forgiven and turn unto God! So that we are in a cruel dilemma. We must either admit that two of the Evangelists did not fully and perfectly express our Lord's thought; or we must admit that our Lord purposely *hid* the truths He came to teach from the vast majority of men, and set Himself to *hinder* them from accepting the grace and salvation of God.

Now, whatever even St. Mark and St. Luke may say, can we possibly make this latter admission? Impossible! All that is purest and best in us, all that we know of Christ and all that we love in Him, conspires with our common sense and our common humanity to protest against it. We say: "Nothing could be more absurd and suicidal in any teacher than to adopt a method which did not teach, to utter his thoughts in forms which hid, instead of disclosing, his meaning; and we cannot believe that the Great Teacher adopted a course so monstrous and unnatural." We say again: "Nothing can be more foreign and opposed to the

very Spirit of Christ than that He should deliberately speak to men so as to mislead them and bind them down to their sins. He came, not to veil, but to declare, the Father; not to hide, but to unfold, the truth; not to blind men, but to open their eyes; not to close the kingdom of heaven against them, but to throw it open to them and to draw them into it; not to condemn, but to redeem, them; and nothing shall ever make us believe that He set forth the truth in forms which men might see yet not perceive, in words which they might hear yet not understand." We say still further: "As simple matter of fact and experience, it is not true that the parables conceal the thoughts and grace of Christ from men; they reveal them. The parable of the Good Samaritan does *not* put us in doubt as to who is our neighbour; it teaches us, with the most tender and persuasive emphasis, that 'nothing human is alien to us,' that every man who needs our help is our neighbour, even though he also be our enemy. The parable of the Prodigal Son does *not* hide from us the love of our Father who is in heaven, but discloses that love with a pathos and a power so divine that, beyond all other forms of speech, it touches and melts our hearts. With such parables before us, with our knowledge of the happy effects they have produced, of what use is it for any man to tell us that Jesus spake in parables in order that, seeing, men might see and not perceive, and hearing, they might hear and not understand, lest at any time they should turn to God and be forgiven? The parables *have* turned myriads to God, and taught them both to seek and to find the forgiveness of their sins. And it is precisely 'the multitude,' the simple and unlettered, those who are least versed in spiritual things, to whom the parables are most welcome, to whom they are instinct with the divinest instruction and power."

These arguments cannot be gainsaid. Christ *was* too

wise to use words that concealed his thoughts, and *did* come to unveil, not to veil, the truths of the kingdom, to help men to forgiveness, not to harden them in their sins. And so far from hiding the truth from men, or hindering them from turning to God, the parables *do*, beyond all other forms of speech, convey the truth to them and make it a saving power within them.

What shall we say, then? that Mark and Luke misconceived our Lord's words on the true purpose and function of parables? Better say *that* than ourselves misconceive the Author of our salvation. But, happily, we need not say it. If we interpret Mark and Luke by Matthew, all we need say is, that they give a condensed and therefore an incomplete report of our Lord's words, a report which we cannot rightly understand until we read it in the light of Matthew's fuller report. So soon as we turn to his Gospel,* we cannot but wonder that we should ever have been perplexed and pained by words which admit of a perfectly simple and candid explanation. St. Matthew tells us *at length*, and with precision, what Jesus said when his disciples asked Him why He spake to the multitude in parables. He said, "Because unto *you* it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to *them* it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. *Therefore speak I unto them in parables, because* (not '*in order that,*' but '*because,*') *seeing, they see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand.* And the prophecy of Isaiah is being anew fulfilled upon them, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed fat, and with their ears they have become dull of hearing, and their eyelids have they drawn down over their eyes, lest at any time they

* St. Matthew xiii. 10-15.

should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should turn, and I should heal them."

No doubt even this passage has difficulties of its own, and hints at that mysterious interaction of the Divine and human wills which is one of the standing, and perhaps insoluble, problems of human thought. But how completely it removes the difficulty suggested by the more condensed reports of Mark and Luke! For, *here*, it is *the people* who have closed their own eyes, not Christ who has closed them: it is *they* who *will not* perceive and understand because they dread the presence and law of God, and do not want to be converted and healed. *Here*, our Lord speaks to them in parables, not to hide truth from them, but to force it on them; not *in order that*, seeing, they may not perceive, and hearing, they may not understand, but *because* they have long failed to exercise their spiritual faculties of perception, and, if they are ever to perceive the truth, must have it set before them in bright vivid pictures; if they are to understand it, must have it "embodied in a tale." Isaiah had predicted that they *would* sink into this low and gross spiritual condition, that they would come to hate the truth and to shrink from it. The prediction has been fulfilled. The Lord Jesus sees that they cannot bear the white light of truth, that it must be broken into attractive colours; that they will not listen to abstract utterances of truth, that these are "mysteries" to them; that, if it is to "find" them, the truth must take homely and familiar forms. *Therefore*—to win them, not to alienate them; to bring them to God, not to keep them away from Him—*He speaks to them in parables*. He treats them as children whose senses have not been exercised to discern good and evil, and tells them stories such as children love, but stories which convey the truths of the kingdom to minds otherwise closed against them. He is seeking to approach and take

them by surprise ; to get the truth into their minds before they discover what He is doing with them. And therefore He paints them pretty pictures of natural scenes, and scenes drawn from human life ; and while they are looking with interest at these pictures, before they have time to " draw their eyelids down," they find that they are gazing on the symbols of spiritual and eternal truths. He tells them pretty homely stories ; and, lo ! while they are listening with charmed and attentive ear, a divine moral peeps through the stories, and they find that they are hearkening to that voice of God which hitherto they have refused to hear and understand.

This, beyond a doubt, was the meaning and intention of our Lord in speaking to the multitude in parables ; for this accords with all we know of Him and of his mission to the world. He spoke in parables because He knew that " truth in closest words may fail," while

" Truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors."

When his disciples asked Him, " Why speakest Thou unto *them* in parables ?" his answer virtually was : " To *you* parables may not be necessary, for unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom ; but for *these* they are necessary, for no such knowledge has yet been given to them. I cannot speak to them as I might to you. They are children in understanding ; they need pictures, illustrations, fables, stories ; only through these can I hope to give them any glimpse into the mysteries which are or will be familiar to you." And if we, perplexed by his answer to the Twelve, repeat the same question, He quotes Asaph at us, and tells us in so many words : " *I open my mouth in parables, that I may utter, not that I may conceal, things that have been kept secret from the foundation of the world, that I may publish to all the mysteries which heretofore have been the possession only of the initiated few.*"

If any ask, "But how came Mark and Luke so much to misrepresent the answer which Matthew reports in full? we reply, "They do not so much misrepresent, as condense, what the Master said. If you carefully compare the three reports, you will find that St. Matthew's *six* verses are compressed into *two* verses by St. Mark, into *one* verse by St. Luke, and that in St. Matthew's fuller report there is some authority for every word in the two shorter reports."

If any pertinacious objector still affirm and ask: "But, after all, the two shorter reports of Mark and Luke do give a wrong impression of what Jesus said and meant; you yourself have admitted that this wrong impression has deeply perplexed and pained many minds: how can you vindicate them for so reporting their Master's words as to convey that He spoke in parables in order to hide the truth from the multitude and to hinder them from forgiveness?" I can only repeat the admission: "They *do* convey our Lord's meaning imperfectly: it *is* very pleasant to be able to correct the wrong impression they make on our minds by the more perfect report of Matthew. I can only say that, if brevity be the soul of wit, it by no means conduces to historical accuracy. I can only suggest that, perhaps, they were permitted to pain and perplex our minds with their condensed and incomplete report, in order to sting us to study and reflection, that we might be compelled to compare Scripture with Scripture, and thus possess ourselves more fully of the 'mind of the Spirit.' For the most part we read Holy Scripture so heedlessly and perfunctorily that, if there were no paradoxes in it, no dilemmas, if we were not at times driven as into a corner from which we can find no loophole of escape, we might never lay a strong grasp even on the truths we most need to know. And if St. Mark and St. Luke, by incompletely reporting their Master's words on parables have so pained and bewildered us by the meaning they

seemed to suggest, that they have stimulated us to thought and research, for us at least they need no further vindication. We thank them for the dark perplexity behind which the Saviour of men seemed to vanish from our eyes, or even to be transformed into the Antagonist of men ; and we thank St. Matthew for restoring Him to us, for shewing us his gracious face smiling out upon us through a window long closed, and enabling us to hear the tones of his mercy in words that have long sounded unworthy of the lips on which sat the law of kindness."

2. But, now that the difficulty is out of our way, let us try to conceive somewhat more vividly the low spiritual condition into which the Jews of our Lord's time had sunk, and how necessary it was, therefore, if He was to speak to them at all, that He should speak to them in parables.

We are all conscious in ourselves of two great tendencies which go far to explain the religious history of men in all ages. We find ourselves in a world the use and beauty of which depend on forces that evade our research and lie beyond our control. Beautiful as it is, too, it is yet at times shaken by convulsions or smitten with plagues which we can neither comprehend nor reduce to order. We long to understand this fair natural world, to understand how it came to be, who rules it, and by what laws, and how its occasional disturbances are to be resolved into harmony with law. And yet *this* tendency and craving of the spirit, this cry of our heart for God, for the living God, is constantly thwarted and contradicted by another. When the creation has revealed a Creator to us and the laws of the universe a Lawgiver, and our moral sense has taught us to conceive of Him as righteous and holy and just, and the voice of Inspiration has revealed his eternal hatred of all evil, we often shrink from a Presence so pure, or contrive to forget it amid the occupations and cares and pleasures of

life. While we are children, when we first learn that it is God who makes the sun to shine, and robes the flowers with beauty, and teaches the birds to sing, and rides upon the storm, and calls forth the stars by name; that it is He who has appointed the several relations of men and ordained their tasks; He who sends our health or sickness, our joy or sorrow; and that He is good and loves us, and is seeking to win our love by all the beauties and changes of our lot;—when we first learn to see God in Nature and in human nature, we are wonderfully impressed; the world and life grow full of beauty to us, full of sacred mystery. But as the years pass, and we are absorbed in exhausting toils, plunged in sordid cares, depraved by customary sins, we lose much of that early sense of a Divine presence and good-will; the world is no longer a mere scene of beauty to us, life no longer a mystery wholly sacred. The orderly progress of Nature, its oscillation between death and life—the sweep to death always ushering in a new and larger life; the return of spring with its perfumes and songs, the universal outburst of the imprisoned life of field and wood; the toils of husbandry, the mysteries of growth, the joy of harvest,—all this wonderful life of Nature culminating in the still more wonderful life of man, in place of being a revelation becomes a veil, hiding God from us; instead of a harmony of voices calling us to worship, it too often becomes a discordant summons to labours of which we are weary or to pleasures by which we are defiled. Even the best of us too commonly live amid all these mysteries of life in a hard mechanical way, or are roused by them to a merely scientific curiosity or a merely æsthetic admiration, instead of being awakened to a renewed and deepened sense of the Divine activity and goodness. The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled anew upon us: *seeing, we see, yet do not perceive; hearing, we hear, but do not understand.*

We can feel little surprise, therefore, that the Jews were for ever falling into the same mechanical temper,—forgetting the God who gave them winter and summer, seed-time and harvest, and crowded every field and garden with a thousand mute or vocal witnesses of his presence and bounty. Even in their better times they were for ever putting God out of their thoughts, growing unmindful of his presence whether in Nature or in the Temple. Hence it was that they were so often smitten with plagues and miseries, so often taught that it *was* God, and God alone, who gave them showers and fruitful seasons ; He who caused the pastures to grow green, and the trees to yield their fruit ; He who filled their barns with grain, and their vats with new wine ; He who was seeking them, and speaking to them, through all the changes of life and all the forms of their worship.

And when the Lord Jesus came to manifest his glory unto Israel, they were at their worst,—most insensible to Him who spake to them through the kindly ordinances of Nature, the words of Scripture, the services of Synagogue and Temple. *Seeing, they saw not; hearing, they did not understand.* Therefore He spake to them, and was obliged to speak to them, in parables. How else could He teach them to see God in all they saw, to hear Him in all they heard? Their very familiarity with the seasonal changes of the natural world and with the common relations of life blinded them to their wonder and beauty. That a sower should go forth to sow ; that the seed should rise through blade and ear to the full corn in the ear ; that different soils should yield different returns, or even the same soil under different cultures : all these and the like familiar processes had lost their charm of spiritual meaning and suggestion. Christ spake to them in parables in order to recover this charm for them, in order to teach them that the whole varied universe is full of a Divine presence and teaching, that

it was for ever speaking to them of a God who was immanent in it and using it as an organ by which to reveal Himself to men.

And far as we have advanced, high as we have risen, do not even *we* need that Christ should come and speak to us in parables? Have not we forgotten the God who is about our path, who besets us behind and before? Have we not hidden Him behind a veil of cosmical forces and natural laws? *Does* He speak to us through all his works and all the changes through which we shift? When men sow seed and find it mingled with tares; when they tend sheep and seek out green pastures for them; when a farmer agrees with his labourers for so much a day; when a merchant buys and sells pearls or other wares of the market; when a woman sweeps a house, or puts leaven in meal;—do these and the like acts speak to us of aught beyond their effect on prices, on health of body, on our personal comfort and gain? Are they quick with suggestions of spiritual realities, or have these all died out of them long ago? In our common relations, as husband and wife, fathers and children, neighbours and friends, masters and servants, do we find anything *more* than natural relations, any hints and remembrances of the relations we sustain to God, to Christ, to the Church, to the spirits of men?

What is Nature but a vast and complex parable? What is human life but a parable still more complex, subtle, and involved? Each of them is instinct with God, instinct therefore with a Divine wisdom and goodness, had we but eyes to see and ears to hear. Did we but recognize his constant presence, and feel that He is all about us, to save and bless us and make us good, we should “turn” to Him day by day and be daily cleansed and strengthened by his “forgiveness.” It is because Nature has become a mere mechanism to us, and life a mere routine, that we are so weak, so rest-

less, so craving, so sinful. Were our eyes but opened, they would for ever fall on mysteries of beauty and goodness ; were our ears unstopped, they would be ravished by the music of an eternal goodwill and love.

Consider the man of science, how in the dullest scene, in objects which to us are simply indifferent or repulsive—in weeds and stagnant ponds, in worms and noisome pests, in dismal swamp or gloomy tropical forest—he finds a whole world of loveliness, and is rapt in ecstasies of wonder and admiration. And if we saw the God and Father of all, and the proofs of his kind wisdom and redeeming love, in all that meets the eye or affects our life, would there not be wonders enough for us to admire ? might not we at times rise into the ecstasies of love and worship ? It is because seeing, we see, but do not perceive a Divine Presence, and hearing, we hear, but do not catch the tender pleadings of a Divine Voice, that to us, as to the Jews, Christ speaks in parables which explain the spiritual meanings of the fair world in which we dwell and of the life we now live in the flesh. Instead of a vague admiration of general laws, mechanical forces, and chemical affinities, He would have us know and trust the God “who covereth the heavens with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who causeth the grass to grow upon the mountains,” and to learn how “fire and hail, snow and vapour,” sunshine and stormy weather, fulfil his word. And therefore it was that, by his parables, He made the world and all that it inherits speak to us of our Father in heaven, and of his love for us, and of our duty to Him ; so that when the sun shines, or the winds blow, or the rains fall, or the lightning flashes out of the clouds, or the birds sing, or the grass grows, or the wild-flowers clothe the grass as with a robe of many colours, or the tares and poppies spring up in the wheat ; or when the shepherd tends his flock, or the farmer puts his hand to the

plough, or a merchant sets out on his travels, or children play in a market-place, or a wild dissolute lad comes home in tears and rags : whatever goes on about us in Nature or in human life is full of spiritual teaching and comfort for us, if only we have listened to the parables of Christ and learned to look out on the world through his eyes.

Can it be, then, that He who has thus brought the truth of God *home* to us, who by his parables has taught us to look for it and to find it everywhere, wishes to hide the truth from us, that we may perish in our sins? It cannot be. He opened his mouth in parables that he might *utter* things which had been kept secret, but were henceforth to be the common property of man. The parables of Christ are a convincing proof that God loves us, and is for ever seeking to open our eyes and to unstop the ears which we have closed, that He may forgive our sins and reconcile us unto Himself. Let us confide in Him, then, and learn of Him, that to us also it may be given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, because we too are the servants and apostles of Christ.

XVIII.

The Phenomena of Growth.

ST. MARK IV. 26-28.

THERE is one parable uttered by our Lord which, either because it is related only by St. Mark, or because it has been much misunderstood, has received far less attention than it deserves. It runs thus : "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should have cast the seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how ; for the ground bringeth forth fruit of itself ; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

Now this parable, which, as I have hinted, has suffered many things at the hands of its critics, is one of three parables, the form of which is derived from the most familiar processes of agriculture. The first of this triad is the Parable of the Sower, in which a husbandman is represented as scattering seed on a great variety of soils with an equal variety of result, to set forth the infinite diversities of the human heart, and of the modes in which it receives the truth of God. The second is the Parable of the Tares of the Field, in which we have a husbandman sowing good seed in a good field, and an enemy coming by night to scatter tares among the wheat ; in which, therefore, the intermixture of error with truth is imaged out, and the immense activity

of evil in obstructing the growth of that which is good. And the third is this parable of St. Mark's, the Parable of the Seed, in which the inherent vitality and productiveness of the good seed and of the truth of God are the main points of comparison.

And this latter parable has, as I have said, suffered much at the hands of its readers. Many readers of the New Testament simply confuse it, either with the Parable of the Sower or the Parable of the Tares ; it has **no** separate and marked individuality for them : while a few critical readers, who have separated it from other parables in their thoughts, announce, as the result of their study, that we have here a rough draft either of the Parable of the Sower or of the Tares ; that our Lord's first effort to give the parable shape having failed, He afterwards recurred to it with better success, and gave it a more perfect form.

But the truth is, that this parable, though very brief, is one of the most exquisite and matterful ever spoken ; nor, if we will only look for them, is there the slightest difficulty in tracing the lines of divergence and contrast between this and the other parables. The difficulty, rather, is to miss them. In motive and meaning the three are wholly distinct. In the Parable of the Sower, as I have pointed out,* the emphasis of illustration lies on the diversities of soil into which the seed is cast, and the variety of results which these diversities occasion : it falls on the wayside, to be carried off by the fowl of the air ; it falls on the thorn-infested ground, to be choked by the quicker growths of evil ; it falls on rocky ground, to wither away for want of depth of root ; and it falls on good ground, to bring forth fruit in some thirty, in some sixty, in some a hundred-fold. In the Parable of the Tares, again, the intense vigilance and activity of evil are set forth : how, even on the best ground, and together with the

* See previous Essay.

finest of the wheat, those detestable tares of error *will* spring up—a quick-growing *zizanium*, a bastard corn, so like the wheat that you can hardly distinguish the one from the other till the ear is formed or you try to live upon it. But in this Parable of the Seed the emphasis is laid, not on the diversities of soil, nor on the surreptitious intermixture of delusive tares, but on the peculiar phenomena of growth, on the germination of the good seed and the successive forms it takes. It marks and emphasizes no less than three of these phenomena of growth : first, *its mystery*—the seed “springs and grows up *we know not how* ;” second, *its spontaneity*—“the earth bringeth forth fruit *of itself* ;” and, third, *its progressiveness*—“*first* the blade, *then* the ear, and *after that* the full corn in the ear.” In fact, the distinctive features of the parable are as clear and marked as they well can be ; and, but for our careless negligent handling of God’s Holy Word, it is inconceivable that truths so distinct as these should have been confused together, simply because the same figure, that of a husbandman sowing seed, is employed in each of the three parables.

And the parable is as accurate and beautiful as it is well-defined. With a few rapid touches it places before us a picture with which we are quite familiar, and discloses a mystery to which our very familiarity often makes us blind. Men *do* sow seed thus, casting it into the ground, then sleeping and waking, leaving it to the operation of ascertained natural laws. The earth *does* bring forth of herself, we cannot tell how. Growth is beyond our knowledge. We can hasten or retard it, but we can neither make the seed spring, nor tell how it grows ; we cannot tell, for instance, which will prosper, this seed or that, nor why the one prospers and the other does not. Yet we help, and God helps. If we sleep through the night, we watch, and weed, and water through the day. And God ! God has implanted the vital principle

in the seed, and the quickening nutritive powers in air, and rain, and earth. We can bring the seed and the earth together; we can do something toward securing happy and favourable conditions of growth; yet we cannot secure growth: the harvest is of God, and varies at his pleasure. We must be careful, indeed, not to push the figure too hard or too far, as if, because "the earth bringeth forth fruit of *itself*," therefore we can do nothing to produce growth, or foster it. Only, when we have done all that we can and used all the helps at our command, there is still a mystery of spontaneity, an orderly progressive development, which our help does not explain. It is part of the mystery of life, and what do we know of *that*? Nature herself bears witness to our ignorance. The husbandman, as the parable reminds us, sleeps through the night; and *that* is just the time, as science affirms, in which growth, for the most part, takes place. Through the day the seed is busy storing up what little modicum of heat, moisture, nourishment, it can get; and in the night, when men sleep, shews that it has got it—*i.e.*, grows. In the dark mysterious night, the mysteries of growth have their appropriate place.

Now the kingdom of God, both as it comes in all the world, and as it comes to the individual heart, is as seed cast into the ground. It presents the same phenomena of growth—mystery, spontaneity, progressiveness.

I. Let us trace the phenomena in the history of the Divine Kingdom *in the world*.

1. There is, first of all, *mystery*. "The seed springs and grows, we know not how." The kingdom of God did not come "with observation." Of all lands, Judæa is to us the most sacred and wonderful; and, of all people, the people of the Jews. The holy land, the chosen people, these are the channels through which we have received the salvation

of God. But the land, so sacred to us, was not sacred to the Romans and the Greeks; to them it was one of the least, and least regarded, provinces of the empire. The people, so holy and wonderful to us, were despised by them as a singularly obstinate, malignant, and intolerant race. *That* was the last place, and *these* the last people, from whom the ruling nations would have looked for a disclosure of heavenly truth, for a benignant and victorious faith. And had they looked for it, the probability is that they would have missed it. They would have gone for it to the metropolis; to the temple in which the rabbis taught, and the priests offered sacrifices; to the most crass and bitter enemies, therefore, of the faith of Christ. The "Light of the World" dawned, not in metropolitan Jerusalem, but in provincial Galilee—in Galilee, the darkest district of the land, in Nazareth, the most depraved village of Galilee. There was a mystery in the very origin of the kingdom, therefore; the good seed sprang up in the darkness.

And an equal mystery attended its growth. It grew, as it sprang, without observation. Men could not point to it and say, "Lo! here," or, "Lo! there," "In the chamber," or,

In the desert." It was everywhere, though almost everywhere unseen. As we trace the history of the Gospel in primitive times, nothing is more surprising to us than the mysterious rapidity with which it diffused itself abroad. The fond persuasion of a few "lewd Galileans," it had spread from heart to heart, from city to city, from race to race, almost before the sages and rulers of this world had seen enough of it even to denounce and persecute it. The kingdom of heaven "took them by surprise," took them "by force:" it embraced and overcame the kingdoms of the earth or ever they were aware. Within three centuries after its first proclamation the faith of the crucified Christ became the regnant faith of a world at enmity against God. The

one divine Seed, of which the present Christendom is the present harvest, fell from heaven, grew up, as in a dry place, in solitary unadmired beauty, blossomed, seeded, fell : but, lo ! its seed-spores were carried abroad on every wind that blew, found a prepared soil under every clime, brought forth fruit in every land. A single spark of light was kindled in the thick darkness in which the people sat. It burned and shone over Jerusalem. For a moment it suffered, or seemed to suffer, total eclipse—to expire in the darkness which veiled the Cross. But it was only for a moment. It reappears, waxes at Pentecost into sudden splendour. It shoots forth rays which travel to Antioch, to Ephesus, to Philippi, to Corinth, to Athens, to Rome, to Ethiopia and Egypt, to Spain, Gaul, Britain, till at last the darkness is beautiful with a multitude of scattered points of light which shine in all the great centres of human activity. These scattered points of light, moreover, expand, rise, diffuse till their outer edges blend and mingle, and the whole civilized world, even through the broad rural spaces which intervene between city and city, is illumined by the gracious light ; till, in place of a night broken by scattered starry beams, there dawns a new glorious day, above, a shining heaven, a rejoicing fruitful earth, below. In vain do the astonished rulers take counsel together to arrest the coming of this day of the Lord. In vain do they rush hither and thither, as the rays travel and spread, to tread out this point of light or that ; the light shines on till the whole atmosphere is aglow, and they themselves are transformed and glorified by its refulgence. To their infinite surprise, they discover that these scattered travelling light-points are not tapers, fashioned by human skill, nor bewildering marsh-fires rising from the swamps of human ignorance, but simply prepared surfaces which reflect the light of heaven ; they discover that a new and brighter day has dawned upon them out of the eternity

of God, and that henceforth even *they* must walk as children of the light and of the day. In less than three hundred years after Pentecost the Christian Faith had conquered the throne of the Cæsars ; yet only fifty years before its triumph it was reported to the emperor as "the obscure persuasion of a few lewd Jews and Gentiles." Such, and so marvellous, was the springing and the growth of the kingdom of God.

2. But as we consider the rise and growth of the heavenly kingdom, we may note a second phenomenon—*spontaneity*. "The earth brought forth fruit of itself." The progress of the kingdom of God, rapid and marvellous as it was, was largely independent of human aid. There are, as we all know, many human powers and influences which we desire to see working together for the good of any cause we take in hand ; as, for instance, wealth, learning, high birth and breeding ; the ministries of art and song ; kinship with the common aims, views, aspirations of men ; royal smiles ; plenitude of means and advocates ; and, above all, organization—the having a well-ordered society labouring at a common purpose on a skilful plan. By a wise use and application of these aids, if only we can apply them, we expect to reach our end—to advance, establish, consolidate the cause in which we take an interest. But none of these were *for* the Gospel ; all of them were *against* it—a banded and apparently impregnable unity. Kings and rulers set themselves against the Lord and against his Anointed One. Learning despised the new Faith too much to refute it. The arts were the ministers of the popular idolatries. Wealth was no more disposed to risk its gains for truth's sake *then* than now, nor to waste in quest of truth time which it might so much more profitably employ. The popular habits were incredibly corrupt, and shrank from the pure Faith which gave them rebuke. The Church was not organized into aggressive societies ; each of those who went forth in the

service of the truth went where he was moved to go in simple dependence on the prompting of the Spirit and the providence of God. None of the outward advantages which we have, or covet, were at the disposal of the disciples. Yet, by manifestation of its inherent resources and energies, the Faith everywhere spoken against conquered the world, converting adversaries into advocates, overcoming evil with its good. The kingdom spread and grew on every side. The earth brought forth fruit of herself. The good seed germinated, breaking through the cold resisting clods, springing and reaching upward to its native heaven, turning to uses of nourishment whatsoever lay between it and the light; till it *reached* the light, and grew up into that great life-tree whose leaves now heal nations.

3. In this mysterious spontaneous growth, it displayed a third phenomenon—*progressiveness*. “*First* the blade, *then* the ear, and *after that* the full corn in the ear.” The kingdom grew from less to more, is growing still, for the progress is not yet complete. “The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it;” and we must “be patient unto the coming of the Lord,” if we would see the full procession of the seed of the kingdom from the weakness of the green blade to the wealth and beauty of the shock of corn fully ripe. As yet we see but in part; but even now already we can see that the process has begun, that even in our own time and that of our fathers it has broadly and rapidly advanced. Since this century dawned, many peoples that sat in darkness have seen the great light; many races, eating that which is not bread and drinking that which satisfieth not, have now received the corn of heaven and have drawn water from the wells of salvation with great joy. Within even a shorter period than that, there has been a marked advance in the simplicity of Christian wisdom and the catholicity of Christian love.

And to-day we may see tokens, though few and far between, of a simpler faith, a broader charity ; the Bible is taking the place of the creed ; the love of man is supplanting the devotion to sect ; the dividing Shibboleths are being "forgotten out of our mouths ;" and the members of the one family are beginning to recognize every man his brother, and to draw together into a sacred unity.

But, alas ! the kingdom of God is still a coming kingdom : it has not fully come as yet, and cannot while we are so selfish and divided. The full corn in the ear is not fully ripe. "The harvest is the end of the world," and *that*, for our sins, is yet far off. Still we may hope for that which as yet we cannot see ; and wiser men than we, using that large discourse of reason which looks before and after, as they have reviewed and forecasted the history of the heavenly kingdom, have divided it into three main epochs, answering to the three stages of development prefigured by the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear. These epochs they have named after the three chief Apostles—Peter, Paul, and John. The Petrine era extends to the Reformation ; the Pauline to the present day ; while the Johanine extends from the proximate future to the close of the Dispensation. The Petrine is the era of morality and worship ; the Pauline the era of dogma and philosophy ; the Johanine the era of wise simplicity and childlike love.

When the Gospel was first proclaimed, it had little to fear from the "outworn creeds" of men. The old pagan religions had lost their vitality and power. They had become incredible. They were regarded as myths, or poems, which set forth natural processes and relations ; as lending a useful sanction to the police regulations of the empire ; as affording a serviceable stimulus to the national unity or enthusiasm : but not as faiths which were to rule the thoughts and lives of men, and for which 'twere well even

to die. The real obstacles with which the primitive disciples had to contend were the scepticism and the inveterate immoralities which idolatry had bred,—the smooth polished licentiousness of thought and conduct beneath which the natural pieties of the human heart were entombed. To bring life to the sepulchre in which a dead world lay and stank amid infinite nameless corruptions—this was their difficult, their superhuman task. And hence we find them encountering an unbelieving generation with a constant reiteration of plain facts—the death, viz., and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, a world steeped in pollutions of which it was well-nigh sick, with an invitation to a pure worship and a pure life. This was the Petrine age, the age in which Peter's devout practical spirit was most prominent, most prolific.

But, as the centuries passed, the Church itself became heathenized. A pantheon of apostles, martyrs, saints supplanted the divinities of Greece and Rome: the statue of Jupiter, now baptized Peter, was again adored as a god. Worship sank and hardened into a gorgeous ceremonialism. Morality was turned from a discharge into an evasion of the duties of life, or into a debtor and creditor account with heaven, the balance of which was commonly against God. The high priest of the Christian Church usurped the throne of the most high God, and, once seated on it, led a life more infamous than that of any votary of Bacchus or any flamen of Aphrodite.

Then arose Luther to purge the Church. Armed with a scourge of small cords, borrowed from the tent-maker of Tarsus, he drove out the unclean rabble which profaned the house of prayer—the money-changers who, for a price, sold indulgences to sin. In the Scriptures of St. Paul he found the truths which were the best answer to the errors of his time, the best corrective to its vices. With the great truth

of "justification by personal faith," and its related dogmas, he destroyed that system of priestly interference between the soul and God which lay at the root of the prevailing heresies and corruptions. Since then at least to a very recent period, good men have been mainly occupied in constructing doctrinal systems, and applying doctrinal tests; in examining, proving, articulating those dogmas, which, after all, compose only the skeleton of truth. This, too, was a necessary task, an indispensable step in the progress; but we may hope that by this time it is nearly over and done. For a skeleton, though a necessary, is a somewhat unlovely, and even repellent, object. We must have one, if we are to live; but we need not be always curiously inspecting it, and still less should we, as some persons do, wear it *outside* our flesh, and perpetually thrust it in our neighbour's face.

And there are hopeful symptoms that the dogmatic era is drawing to a close. Many, in all sections of the Christian Church, have learned that vital faith in Christ is "more than all the creeds;" that to live in holy charity is the supreme duty of all who worship God in sincerity and truth. Many dividing prejudices, bigotries, sectarianisms have been renounced, and even those who have not renounced are beginning a little to distrust them. In all quarters of the common Temple there is a sensible stir and movement, not this time, thank God, away from each other, but toward each other; not indicative of a desire to retreat into separate courts, but of a determination to break down all party walls, and to rend all dividing veils, that there may be one service in *His* house who is the God and Father of us all. Many auspicious omens seem to point to the coming of "the full corn in the ear;" to the advent of a time in which the catholic spirit of the loving and beloved John will be the animating and dominant spirit of all who serve Christ.

May God speed its coming, and give us grace, each according to his several ability, to speed it too.

II. But we have also to trace the operation of these same phenomena in the spiritual history of *the individual man*.

1. And, first, for *mystery*. The good seed springs up we know not how. In some cases, indeed, and to a certain extent, the reception of the truth, the germination of the seed of the kingdom, may be matter of distinct consciousness. The ploughshare of affliction may have passed over the heart; the hammer of judgment may have broken and pulverized the rock; the fire of Divine Love may have burned up the briars and thorns which infested the soil, and in the good ground thus prepared good seed may have been strewn by a hand of which we are aware. We may be able to recall the very truth which first awakened conviction, and the circumstances which had prepared us to receive it. But, very commonly, the planting and germination of truth are matter of unconsciousness. We cannot tell *when* the seed fell, or *how* it grew, where or how we began to live unto God. Winged seeds of truth were floating through the air, and some of them fell softly in a quiet unregarded corner of our heart. Silent and unseen they lay, pushing forth vital germs in the darkness. Not till the blade began to appear above the surface did we know that the Great Husbandman had commenced his gracious culture.

Because of this mystery in the springing of the seed many genuine believers hold themselves in doubt, and often fear that God has not caused the truth to take root within them. They forget that in its inception all life is weak and unconscious. The babe comes plaining into the world, seeing nothing, having no conscious enjoyment of its powers—most of its powers as yet lying dormant. The seed puts

forth its first tender germ, escaping the bondage of the husk only to meet the cold hard clods ; not till it reach the light can it clothe itself in beauty, and wave freely in the free air of heaven. And it is thus with the beginning of the spiritual life, with the germination of the Divine seed. For a time it lies beneath the surface of consciousness. After the first faint joy of escape from the husk of sinful habit, there comes the sense of darkness and obstruction. Hindering clods gather round it, seeming to thwart and oppress the rising life. Not till it has reached the light of day can we be sure that it has begun to live. If any of us know what this means, let us take heart. That we cannot tell when the seed fell, or how it sprang, what the truth was which first impressed us, or how it gathered force, need not disturb our peace. *Mystery* is a law of growth. The obstructions which seem to thwart our growth will not really thwart it ; they are there only that the energies of our life may be concentrated, may gather new vigour from resistance. So soon as we are strong enough to pierce them, the hindering clods will not hinder, but feed, our growth ; they will yield us the very discipline and nutriment we need.

And this mystery attaches, not only to the first, but to all subsequent seed. It is not the words we hear, but the words we receive and appropriate, which really spring up and bring forth fruit within us. And the process of that growth, is it not this ? An unregarded word—a word to which, when we heard it, we gave little heed—sinks silently into our heart. It lies there, still and quiescent, for days, weeks, months, perchance ; till at last, touched and quickened by some inward experience, it rises into life, becomes a blessing and a joy—we cannot tell how !

Nay, even when we seek consciously and of set purpose to gather seeds of truth, and to compel them to germinate in our minds, when we steadfastly give ourselves to the study

of the Word, that we may possess ourselves of its hidden store of good, much of the process is still very mysterious. Our best thoughts, our profoundest insights, *come to us*; we do not go step by step to them, gradually approaching them by logical advances; but suddenly they are with us, their beauty unveiled, their power manifest. Almost all who have to teach the truth will admit that, if they wish to comprehend some deep saying of Holy Writ, to feel its real inward force, to master its inmost secret, they have to wait as well as to think and pray; they will tell you that often their best course is to let it lie in their minds for weeks or months, without making any immediate or conscious effort to master it. As they go about their daily tasks the Word lies, apparently inactive, floating on the current and surface of their thoughts; yet all the while it is throwing out one delicate fibre here and another there, taking root downward and pushing stems upward, connecting and interpreting itself through whatever books they read, whatever thoughts and affections are excited within them, till at last it gives up its secret, yields its fruit, and their joy of harvest is deepened by the joy of conquest. The seed grows, they know not how, till it has fruit in itself, and only a vigorous effort is requisite to crush it into flour and knead it into a living bread.

2. But, again, we have to mark the *spontaneity* of the spiritual growth. The good seed "bringeth forth fruit of itself." If we cannot compel the seed to grow in our own hearts, still less can we make it grow in other hearts. It must bring forth fruit *of itself*; that is, by virtue of the principle of life which God has infused into it, and of the means of life with which He has graciously surrounded it. And here we come on a very needful warning against impatience, against undue interference. In order that there may be growth, the Sun of Righteousness must shine upon

the seed sown ; the dew of heavenly grace must fall ; and, if these quickening influences be vouchsafed, the seed will thrive on any soil, however thin and poor, without our help. Less depends on our efforts than we sometimes think. We may, indeed—nay, we should—weed and water and watch through the day ; but, after all, the great growth will be at *night*, when we are asleep : and the good seed will spring up, not so much from anything we have done, as from the vital reproductive power which God has given to his truth, and the gracious influence which He sheds from above.

We must have been very heedless, or very unfeeling, if we have not often felt how helpless we are ; if we have not learnt that Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but that God alone can give growth. You have doubtless seen those whom you love exercised with doubts, beset with fears. A good work seems to have been begun upon them, but it makes no progress, or appears to make no progress. You have felt, perhaps, as if you could almost coin your life away to give them life ; but there is nothing that you can do : and you stand by in a passion of unavailing solicitude and prayer. But, happily, *that* is just the best thing you can do—pray to the Growth-Giver. Beneath his blessing, the earth will bring forth of itself, if only you will let it alone. Have faith in God, and in God's Word, and in God's Spirit ; have no faith in yourselves, or in anything that you can do. Break up the soil ; sow the good seed ; water it with your tears and prayers : and then leave it calmly and hopefully with God. Don't be impatient for results, but have patience, and, if need be, "long patience." Don't be like foolish children, for ever digging up the seed to see whether it grows or how it grows. But rest in the assurance, that whosoever goeth forth weeping and sowing precious seed *shall* return again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

3. Then, finally, as *progressiveness* is another law of spiritual growth, we have another reason for patience and hope. In our impatience, we often expect not only that the good seed will visibly grow the very moment it is sown, but even that it will bring forth fruit. No sooner has the truth been planted in our hearts, or at latest the green blade of profession has scarcely peeped above the soil, than we think we are to eat of its precious fruit and be satisfied. We cannot tarry for the slow natural processes through which the fruit ripens and is made perfect; and so we employ all kinds of artificial stimulants to hasten the harvest. We run after religious novelties and excitements; we attempt to bend our thoughts and feelings to a high strain of devotion to which they have not fairly risen; and, as the reward of our impatience, we are oppressed with a sense of the unreality of our spiritual life, and sometimes either harden into hypocrisy or drift into a settled scepticism. *Growth*, natural, steady, progressive growth, should be our aim—the growth which is the natural expression of the inward strength we have gained by a wise use of the truths, and gifts, and ordinances of God—growth never hasting, yet never resting—the growth which springs from the vivifying beams of the Lord our Sun, and the continual dews of the Holy Spirit, and a frank susceptibility to all pure and nourishing influences whether from earth or heaven. Let us be patient, then, with the patience of faith. The sower sleeps and rises night and day; but God never slumbers nor sleeps. He will not forsake the work of his own hands, nor suffer any seed of his planting to wither and die.

Let us be charitable and considerate, as well as patient. In the field of the Church the good seed is to be found in all stages of development: here, in the green blade; there, in the ear; and yonder, in its golden prime. And it does sometimes happen that the blade sets itself up to judge the

ear, and condemns it because, unlike itself, it bears the full corn. Let us not judge one another any more. Whatever our stage in the divine progress may be, our main business is to grow, to bring *our* fruit to its ripe maturity, not to judge the neighbouring stalks.

Let us remember, moreover, that the seed grows mainly in the night, and so learn to take thankfully whatever darknesses or sorrows the Great Husbandman may send, knowing that his will and purpose are that we should bring forth fruit, and bring it forth more abundantly.

Last of all, let us acknowledge that if we are without fruit unto God, that is our fault, not his. The Divine Sower has scattered many good seeds on our hearts. He has neglected no means of culture—the sun has risen and shone, the gracious quickening rains have fallen. If the seed has not sprung, it is because we have resisted his culture and ministry; because we have permitted the thronging pleasures of life to make a common highway of our hearts; because we have suffered the cares of life, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lusts of other things, to enter in and choke the good word of truth and make us unfruitful. We need not remain fruitless. We dare not be like the barren ground which brings forth only noxious weeds and poisonous thorns, “whose end is to be burned.” The Growth-Giver waits to give us growth, to conduct us through all the steps of the divine progress—first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, which, so soon as it is fully ripe, will be gathered with joyful shouts and merry songs into the garner of our God.

XIX.

The Splinter and the Beam.

MATT. VII. 3—5.*

THE metaphor of the splinter and the beam was in frequent use among the Jews. Thus, for instance, Rabbi Tarphon, when lamenting the impatience of correction which marked his time, complains that if any one said to his neighbour, "Cast out this or that straw from thine eye," the response was sure to be, "Cast out the beam from thine own eye." The good man, being one of those just persons who need no repentance, never dreamt that there *was* a beam in his eye, and that therefore the retort was perfectly fair. He could see straws in every eye but his own, and was quite ready to pluck them out; but when his neighbours offered the same kind office to him, he took the offer as an insult. He was a rabbi, and therefore not open to censure or reproach. If any wind of doctrine blew specks or straws into an eye so sensitive as his, he was perfectly able to rub them out without his neighbours' help.

* "Why starest thou at the splinter in the eye of thy brother, and apprehendest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or, how wilt thou say to thy brother, 'Let me pull out the splinter from thine eye,' and, behold, the beam is in thine own eye? Hypocrite! Pull out, first, the beam from thine own eye; then, thou shalt see clearly to pull out the splinter from the eye of thy brother."

The Lord Jesus adopted the Hebrew metaphor, but not in the Hebrew spirit. On his lips it does not justify, but censures, those who assume to judge and rebuke their brethren. He affirms that the retort which shocked the Rabbi was a fair retort. He affirms that those who were quick to detect straws in their neighbours' eyes usually carried a beam in their own.

1. In what way does this Parable of the Splinter and the Beam connect itself with the main argument of the Sermon on the Mount? Thus :—The Lord Jesus had been teaching that the righteousness of his disciples must exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. In their alms, in their prayers, in their fasts, in the conduct of their daily life, in their anticipations of the future, they were to shew a modesty, a charity, a self-distrust, a filial confidence in their Father in heaven, which had no place in the righteousness of the Pharisees and Scribes. Now the Scribes and Pharisees had a very quick eye for their neighbours' faults, and tongues very ready to condemn them. It was part of their *righteousness* to be strict, harsh, severe in their judgments. They were holier than others : and how could they impress that fact upon their neighbours more profoundly than by rigorously condemning their errors and defects? In their insane self-conceit, they divided humanity into two classes : *they* formed one class, all other men formed the other class. This other class, although it included nearly the whole world, they called "the rest," "the refuse," and thanked God they were not like them. They did not regard even their own brethren according to the flesh as brethren ; they held that even the Jews were, for the more part, altogether born in sin.

"*You* are not to do that," said the Lord Jesus to his disciples. "In this, as in so much else, your righteousness must surpass that of the Scribes. You are not to separate

yourselves from any man. A man does not cease to be a man, nor a brother a brother, because the wind has blown a splinter into his eye. You have no right to judge him. If you do judge him, you shall be judged ; and the very measure you mete out to him shall be meted to you. Nay, if you begin to judge him, to quarrel with the straws in his eye, that very moment you assume to be his better, his superior, not his brother : by that very act, because it shews you are of a proud unbrotherly heart, you prove that you carry a beam in your eye for every splinter you rebuke in his : in censuring him, you condemn yourselves. Judge not, therefore, that ye be not judged. Do not 'stare' at the mote in your brother's eye till you forget that he is your brother ; but remember, rather, how far your eye is from being single and clear. Do not gad about bidding your neighbours stand and mark how deftly you can extract their splinters, but practise on your own till you can prove yourself their brother by helping them so dexterously and modestly that, while you cleanse their eyes, they shall hardly know it is you who do it."

This I take to be the meaning of our Lord's Parable as part of his Sermon on the Mount. But now let us detach it from its connections, and consider it by itself apart.

2. If, as you are walking down a street, a passing gust should flick a speck of dust, or a tiny splinter of straw into your eye, would that sharpen your sight? Rather, it would so cloud and embarrass your sight that your next-door neighbour might strut by, with as big a beam as he could carry protruding from his brows, and you be none the wiser. And if a straw or a splinter would thus impair the natural clearness of your vision, how much more would a beam? If *that* were thrust into your eye, you would give up all hope of ever seeing clearly again. Yet our Lord speaks of a beam in the eye as though it sharpened some men's sight! It is

when the beam is in their own eye that they detect the tiniest mote in their brother's eye!

On the other hand, if, while you were suffering from a speck of dust or a tiny splinter floating in the humours of the eye, some friend were to offer to brush it out; and you, clearing and steadying the eye for a moment as best you could, and looking intently at him, were to see a great beam jutting out from beneath his brow: would you think highly of his competence for the task? Would you not rather instinctively say, "First pull out the beam that is in thine own eye?" Yet our Lord implies that those who carry a beam in their own eye are precisely those who deem themselves most competent to extract even the minutest specks which trouble the eyes of their neighbours!

In the physical region, then, the Parable both does, and does not, hold good. On the one hand, a beam in the eye does not sharpen its sight: and, on the other, a beam in our neighbour's eye is a very good reason why we should not trust him to pluck straws out of ours.

But in morals the case is different. *There* a beam in the eye does sharpen sight. For when we say of a man who censures our faults, "He has a beam in his own eye," what we mean is, that he himself is guilty of the same or of similar faults. And to have committed a fault does make us more sensitive to the faults of others; to have sinned opens our eyes to signs and symptoms of which we were before unconscious. A pure child or maiden might pass, smiling and unharmed, through scenes which to many of us would be full of guilty and impure suggestion. We must break through the hedge of law before we can eat the fruit of the Tree which stands in the midst of the garden: we rise, or fall, to the knowledge of good and evil only as we lose our innocence. The bigger the beam in our own eye, the more quickly do we detect the smallest splinters in our

brother's eye. Probably, of all creatures the devil has the keenest and greediest eyes for evil, and is the very first to detect the faintest motions of irregular or inordinate desire within us. And, certainly, as many of us have found to our cost, our evil tempers and passions make us very quick to detect the like passions and tempers in others,—so quick, indeed, that we sometimes see them when they are not there, the beam in our own eye casting a shadow into other eyes which we mistake for a splinter or a straw. Thus, for example, a man who thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think, is the first to detect and to resent any motions of vanity in his associates; a quarrelsome woman scents her neighbour's anger in the wind when the bystanders are unaware that any storm is a-brewing to their peace: those who are rude, inhospitable, domineering, false, are instantly offended at their own faults in a neighbour's conduct, even though their neighbour has shewn them in much lesser degree, and sometimes when he has not shewn them at all. Indeed I have known men whose sight has been so sharpened by the very big beam they carried in their own eye, that they have gone about clutching indiscriminately at every straw or splinter they met, scratching or bruising the faces in which they could detect no speck, *making* the blemish they could not find.

Let this, then, be our first lesson: that, if we are so quick to see straws in the eyes of our neighbours that we can hardly look into any face without detecting one, the probability is that we carry a beam in our own eye of which we greatly need to be rid.

3. But again:—If, in walking down the street, we were to see a neighbour blinded and in pain, rubbing his eye in the hope of rubbing out some speck or mote, but rubbing it *in* rather than out, would it not be kind and brotherly of us

to stop and offer him our help? And if we ourselves chanced to be suffering at the time even more than he, if the splinter in our eye were so big that it might be called a beam, would there not be an admirable self-denial in our kindness? If we offered help when we ourselves were in such sore need of help, would it not be very hard that, in return for our kindness, our neighbour should call us "Hypocrite!" and bid us look to ourselves?

Yet *that* is just what the Lord Jesus does, or seems to do. *He* says we are hypocrites if, with a beam jutting from our own eye, we say to our brother, "Let me pull out the splinter from thine eye." Is it hypocritical, then, to do a kindness, and to offer help, when we ourselves stand in need of help? By no means. But if we are greatly in need of help, and do not know it, and so soon as our neighbour wants only a little help, we are very conscious of that, there is, to say the least of it, something imperfect and untrue in our perceptions. For why do we say to our brother, "Let me pull out the splinter from thine eye?" Simply because we think it injurious to any one to have a splinter in the eye. Yet, all the while, we have not a splinter merely, but a beam, in our own eye! With the tongue we say one thing; with the eye, another. Our words mean, "O it is very wrong and bad to suffer the smallest speck to remain in the eye;" our conduct means, "There is no great harm in letting even a beam remain in it." That is to say, we *are* hypocrites; we talk one thing and act another; we say what we do not believe; we are judging our neighbour by a standard we do not apply to ourselves. If the sinner rebuke sin, who will listen? If the sinner, while rebuking sin, affect a righteous austerity and assume to be innocent of transgression, who will not scorn both him and his rebuke? Not only has he no right to rebuke us, but obviously he does not believe in his own

rebuke. He is making a mock of us, and discharging his private spleen through the pure law of God.

4. But here we touch on a question of grave practical moment. The question is: "Are only the holy to open their mouths against sin? Are we *all* to refrain from rebuke because we have all come short of the glory of God?"

There can be no doubt that the holier we are the more effective our rebukes will be, though, possibly, we shall be the more sparing in the use of them; for we all know that if any wise and holy person, whom we profoundly respect, quietly warn us against our besetting sins, we feel that *he* has some right to rebuke,—and the more right, the less need. When Miss Nightingale went about among the sick soldiers in the Crimean hospitals, there was no need for her to rebuke them for profane language or obscene jests, although these were familiar to many of their lips. They felt they could not utter them in a presence so kind and pure. Many of them we are told "folded their hands as if in prayer" while she passed by. And I suppose that if any one of them, from mere force of habit, had dropped a word unfit for her to hear, her mere look would have been rebuke enough to make him wish that he had bitten out his tongue rather than have uttered it. Do you imagine that when she spoke to a man, if she ever did, of his faults and sins, he felt that she had no right to speak, that she was a hypocrite for her pains? But why not? Simply because, as they looked up into that pure single eye, they could see the splinters in their own, and grew ashamed of them. See, then, what force a holy character gives to rebuke! See how a holy character is itself the most gentle and the most effective rebuke of evil! If you would reprove deeds of darkness, you must bring them *to the light*, not to a darkness only less deep than their own.

But some man will say, "We can't all of us be such saints

as that ; and are we to hold our tongues till we are ?” God forbid ! Or by what right would any of us exhort and rebuke our brethren ? To “hold our tongues” might, indeed, be very good discipline for many of us ; still, there are times in which we should and must speak. At such times all depends on how, in what temper and spirit, we utter our rebuke.

From this man with the beam in his eye we may learn at least what to avoid. What are his faults ?

His first fault is, that he does not know the beam to be there. He walks about “staring” at the tiny straws and splinters in other men’s eyes, but does not apprehend the huge beam that is in his own eye. Now we all know how irritating that is. If a bad-tempered man lecture us on our sins of temper, or a niggard on our want of liberality, or a Pharisee on our lack of religion ; if, without any sense of his own faults, he is for ever rebuking our faults, we resent his interference ; we wonder how he can have the face to lecture us on sins which are still more prominent in him than in us : we are so occupied in considering the beam in his eye that we cannot recognise the splinters in our own, or make very light of them. But if he were to come to us confessing and lamenting his faults, telling us how they stood in his way, how they had injured and debased him, how he longed and strove to be quit of them, we should listen to him in a very different spirit. His confession of sin would quicken our consciousness of sin, his dread of it would awaken a wholesome dread in us, his endeavour to be quit of it would stimulate our endeavours. In the light of his confession, our very splinters would swell into beams ; and finding ourselves so radically diseased and maimed, we should go for healing to the Great Physician of souls.

The second fault of this man is like unto the first. Because he is not conscious of the beam in his own eye, he assumes airs of moral superiority, and carries himself like a

judge instead of a brother. The parable puts before us a man who, though worse than others, thinks himself better. He walks through street and market-place, an incarnate censure, staring at the splinters in the eyes of all he meets, and, instead of yielding brotherly help, calls them as criminals to his bar and condemns them. Hence it is that our Lord lays such emphasis on the word "brother," repeating it no less than three times in this brief parable.

Now if we would consider that every man whom we meet *is* our brother, that single consideration would have two happy effects on us. First, every time we met a man with a diseased or injured eye, we should say, "He is my brother, and because I am of one blood with him, I may be afflicted with the disease from which he suffers, and, at the least, must be liable to it." And, again, we should say, "He is my brother, and therefore I must deal tenderly with him; his pain is my pain, his defect my defect; I must help him as I would help myself." Given in this spirit, how wholesome and precious our rebukes would be! How gently we should handle the irritated eye! how carefully we should endeavour to remove the mote which impaired the clearness of *our brother's* vision!

Put these two pictures side by side, and you will not doubt from which of them we should draw our inspiration. There goes a judge, immaculate in his own conceit, and lifted far above the common run of men; he stares with cold rebuke at the splinters which deform all eyes but his, and condemns in others faults not comparable to the crimes with which he pollutes the judgment-seat. And here come two brothers; and as they fall on each other's neck, they cry, "Ah, brother, I see you are troubled with the very straws and splinters which afflict me! Help me, and let me help you, that we may both be quit of them."

5. Is not this parable true to our experience of life?

Does it not contain a warning of which we all stand in need? yes, *all*, however wise we may be, or however lowly our estate? By what evil instinct of our nature it is, or what combination of instinct with circumstance, it is impossible to say, but somehow it does happen that we all have an inbred and assured persuasion of our superiority to our neighbours. We may not acknowledge it; we may not be conscious of it even: for it is the beam in our eye, which, as a rule, we do not "apprehend." But we may become conscious of it, if we will; and we ought, if we can.

Here, for instance, is a woman who does not profess to be at all original or profound; she has neither invented anything for herself, nor studied the methods and inventions of others deeply: she is merely doing what she has been accustomed to do all her life. Nevertheless, she has somewhere picked up certain habits and modes—methods of cooking, for example, or of managing a house, or of training children—which she quietly assumes to be, which she is quite sure are, the very best in the world. She sincerely pities the poor housewives who follow different traditions, the poor children who are brought up on a different method, the poor servants who are managed and taught to go about their work in a different way. She don't want to boast; but for making of butter, or making a bed, or making a tart, or getting through a spring cleaning, or guiding a kitchen, or dressing and feeding a baby, she has a calm profound conviction, unbroken by a single doubt, that she may back herself against the world; and were the world to beat her, she would never know it. In all these domestic matters she has a *righteousness* of her own, that is, a right way of her own; and she has no doubt that her righteousness far exceeds that of her sister scribes and Pharisees.

Here, again, is a man of no unusual weight of brain, with comparatively little education and experience. He

would be unfeignedly shocked at the thought of claiming superiority over all men, of presenting himself as the very acme and flower of the human race. Yet unconsciously he does claim this superiority, and that in many ways. Take only one of them. He knows nothing of political economy as a science. He takes all his political views from the solitary newspaper he reads. He has had no opportunity of studying the history of nations, of tracing to their issues the political experiments which have been repeated again and again from the beginning of the world. Nevertheless, he believes and appropriates all that his paper tells him. He gives "*his* views," the good man, by which he means the views of his newspaper, on all political topics, and holds himself competent to pronounce on the most subtle and complicated political problems. He never doubts but that he is right, and that all who differ from him are wrong. He has repeated the same opinions so often that they must be true. There are men to whom he would defer on other points, but on these political points he will defer to no man, for on these he is above mistake, infallible as the Pope himself. And nothing seems to shake his faith, nothing avails to teach him how incompetent he is to handle questions so large, and which have their roots so deep in human life and history. I absolutely knew a man who, though three times bankrupt in ten years, was for ever urging on the Chancellor of the Exchequer his scheme for paying off the national debt ! He actually dated one or two of his schemes from a debtors' prison ! Of all husbands the most obedient, of all men the meekest I have met, and the most incompetent to manage his own affairs, he never for one instant distrusted his capacity to rule the destinies of Great Britain.

It is against this unconscious self-assumption that our Lord warns us in this Parable. The very moment that we assume to be wiser and better than our neighbours, to look

down on them with superior scorn or superior pity, we begin to carry a beam in our eye which we do not apprehend ; and a beam that, while impairing our moral vision in all other respects, will sharpen our sight for the straws and splinters in other eyes. And, perhaps, the most remarkable point in the parable is, that our Lord seems to think *religious* persons specially liable to this strange disorder of the eye. It was the Scribes and Pharisees, the most religious men of their time, who judged their brethren, and condemned almost as many as they judged. It was his disciples who were in danger of tilting at other men's splinters with their beams. It is we, therefore, we who worship God, who most need to listen and take heed to the warning. That rooted persuasion of our own superiority to other races and other men which, as we have seen, infects our common life, is only too apt to taint our very worship and to impair our charity. In our religious, even more than in our domestic and political creed, we are in danger of accounting ourselves right in that odious sense which puts all who differ from us in the wrong.

Are all men our "brothers?" What, even "the rest," "the refuse," out there in the world, who make no profession of faith, and attend no place of worship? We find it very hard to believe that they are, although our Father in heaven causes his rain to fall on them, and his sun to shine on them, and his Spirit to strive with them. We are tempted to say, '*We* believe; we are members of the Christian Church; we help to extend the kingdom of Christ in the earth. Surely we are somewhat better than they!' Perhaps we are better: but even if we are, our brother does not cease to be our brother because he has been wild and foolish and sinful, because he has fallen before temptations from which we have been kept; and the way to win him to a better life is, not to affirm our supe-

riority, but to shew that we still hold him for a brother and would be glad to help him. Even for ourselves it would be better if, instead of saying, "We believe," we were to consider how little of all that Christ has revealed has yet come home to our faith; if, instead of saying, "We are of the Church," we were to ask, "What has the Church gained by our adhesion to it?" if, instead of saying, "We have helped to extend the kingdom of Christ," we were to say, "How little we have done to extend his kingdom, whether in our own or other hearts!"

And if we find it hard to refrain from judging what we call "the world,"—is it any easier to refrain from judging what we call "the Church?" Do the various sects which compose the Church give each other credit for having honestly reached their several conclusions, and believe that those who differ from them are as sincere and devout, as dear to God, as they themselves? Do they never condemn their own faults in others? never snatch at splinters unconscious of the beam they carry? We have need to remember that this habit of discerning and plucking at splinters in other eyes is the surest proof that a beam is in our own, and the very beam most fatal to clear spiritual vision and healthy spiritual life. For no error of creed is half so fatal as the want of charity which denies the brotherhood of any who put their trust in Christ. We may have all knowledge, the faith that removes mountains, and a martyr's zeal; but if we have not charity, we have nothing, and are nothing. And, moreover, we have need to remember that as we are judge or brother, Christ will be Brother or Judge to us. Judge, and ye shall be judged. Be a brother, and Christ will not be ashamed to call you brethren. For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Give judicial measure, and you will have judicial measure. Give fraternal measure, and you will have fraternal.

XX.

On Giving Holy Things to Dogs, and Casting Pearls before Swine.

ST. MATT. VII. 6.

OF all the minor parables, or proverbs, contained in the Sermon on the Mount, this perhaps is the most commonly and the most loosely quoted. There are few who seem to have a clear and definite conception of its original meaning. The general impression appears to be that it stands apart, having no connection with either what goes before or what comes after it ; that it is an aphorism thrown loose upon the world, complete in itself, and to be applied in any way we think fit to apply it. Nor do the Commentators yield us much help. Many of them, indeed, take chapters v. to vii. of St. Matthew's Gospel as containing only brief notes, only "the heads," of the sermon delivered on the mountain, not as giving a connected discourse ; and, naturally, they do not expect to find in it logical sequences and the links which bind thought to thought. Other of the Commentators have looked for these links—not with the happiest results. They have been content to find verbal and formal connections ; to point out how one *word* may have suggested another : and hence they have missed those deeper and more subtle connections and developments which give force to the thought of every separate sentence.

If we would understand what our Lord meant, what He really had in his mind, we shall get little help from books ; we must be at the pains of tracing out his meaning for ourselves.

1. First of all, then, let us look carefully at the words He uses, and try to read them in the sense in which they would be taken by those who heard them.

Give not the holy, or, that which is holy, to the dogs. The Greek term which our Authorised Version renders "that which is holy" would be more accurately rendered by "*the holy things*." It is a technical term, and signifies the sacrificial meats laid upon the altar of God.* Of these meats no unclean man was permitted to eat ; how much less, then, an unclean dog? To the Jewish mind there could hardly be a more scandalous profanation than for a priest to take hallowed meats from the altar and cast them to dogs. For we must remember that to the Jew the dog was not what he is to us. To us, he is a favourite companion, a faithful guardian, a pleasant, and often an accomplished, friend. To the Jew, he was odious and unclean ; even to touch him was to become unclean. In Jerusalem then, as now throughout the East, the masterless dogs gathered in hordes, prowling through the streets by night, devouring the offal, and at times attacking the belated traveller. They were the scavengers of the city, and were spared simply because, in those unsanitary days, they fulfilled that necessary function. Throughout the Hebrew Scripture the word "dog" is used as a term of reproach and contempt, just as it was in Europe through the Middle Ages, when "dog of a Jew," "dog of an infidel," "dog of a Christian," were phrases common on

* See Leviticus xxii. 6—16 in the Septuagint, where *τὰ ἁγία* is thus used several times ; as also in Jeremiah xi. 15, and Haggai ii. 12. The Fathers apply the same term to the consecrated elements of the Eucharist.

men's lips.* Regarding the dog thus, we can easily conceive with what horror a Jew would be filled at the mere notion of giving the holy sacrifices of the altar to the unclean scavengers of the streets.

"Neither cast ye your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turning, rend you." Swine, like dogs, were pronounced unclean by the Hebrew law. Lazy, greedy, sensual, self-willed, offensive, they are still held unclean among all nations—except, perhaps, the Irish. Men have gone far enough, and low enough, for objects of worship; but I do not remember to have read of any tribe which paid divine honours to the pig. In Judea they had a more formidable breed of swine than ours, a breed armed with sharp tusks, with which, when enraged, they would turn upon a man and rend him.†

Pearls are among the most valued and admired ornaments of the Orient, and were commonly used as a symbol of what men held to be precious, especially of the wise sayings of rabbis and sages.

But where is the sense of casting pearls before swine? Who would think of doing that? What is the point of likelihood in so strange a figure as this? We can see how, if sacrificial meats were cast to dogs, they would rush upon them and devour them: but what appetite should swine

* To liken oneself to a dog was, and to this day is, in the East, the last form of self-debasing humility. Thus, for instance, the traveller Knox relates a story of a nobleman in Ceylon who, when asked by the king how many children he had, replied, with the base servility which a Western finds it so hard to understand, "*Your Majesty's dog has three puppies.*" Thus, too, Mephibosheth, son of Saul, when he came trembling before David, said: "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a *dead dog* as I?" (2 Samuel ix. 8.)

† The word *σφαγγέρες* well expressed the quick sharp turn of the boar; and the *ρήξωσι* the nature of the wound he inflicts, which is formidable not so much from its depth as from being a long tearing or ripping up, or, as we have it, *rending*.—Trench, *in loco*.

have for pearls? The point is, I believe, that pearls are like some kinds of grain with which swine are fed ; inso-much that we ourselves call the smaller sorts of pearls *seed-pearls*. If these pearls were cast before swine, they would rush upon them eagerly, mistaking them for food. So that the figure suggested to our Lord's hearers by the second sentence of the Parable would be such as this. There goes a man with a sieve full of seed-pearls, which he casts before the greedy swine. The swine, having no sense of humour in them, are enraged at finding hard stones between their teeth when they looked for soft nutritious grain ; they turn upon the man, gore and rend him with their tusks, trampling the deceptive pearls under their angry feet.

We are now, I hope, in a position to understand *the words* of the Lord Jesus very much as his hearers understood them. The first warning is, "Do not give hallowed meats of the altar to the foul scavenging dogs who haunt the streets ;" and the general meaning of it may be, "Do not give holy things to unholy persons." The second warning is, "Do not cast pearls, instead of grain, before the greedy swine ;" and its general meaning may be, "Do not give things of price to those who cannot appreciate their value."

2. Now these are useful sayings, and they are expressed in figures so graphic that the world will not willingly forget them. But was there any need for the Lord Jesus to come down from heaven to give us such maxims as these—maxims which, read in *this* sense, may be easily matched from Confucius, or Menander, or Epictetus, or even from any collection of English proverbs? Can we believe that He meant no more than we have yet learned from Him? Are these cold prudential aphorisms to be our only reward for our attempt to enter into his meaning? We cannot believe it. We know enough of Him who spake as never

man spake to be sure that there must be a deeper and more spiritual, as well as a more definite, meaning in his words. Our only doubt or difficulty is how to reach that meaning. And here, surely, the context ought to help us.

Let us look, then, at the words which precede this proverb, and see if they have any help to give. The verses which immediately precede it contain the parable of the Splinter and the Beam. They warn us against judging and condemning in others the very faults of which we ourselves are guilty. They assure us that so often as we judge our brother, even though we have not committed his fault, we sin against duty and charity; against duty, since God has reserved all judgment to Himself; against charity, since God has bidden us love our brother and not judge him. By the mere act of judging, therefore, we convict ourselves of a graver fault than that we condemn; with a beam in our own eye, we pluck at the splinter in our neighbour's eye. Is there any connection between that parable of the Splinter and the Beam, and this proverb about holy things and dogs, pearls and swine?

Assuredly there is; but it is a connection which throws light on that rather than on this. Indeed, we might think that the one passage contradicted the other. For, in the former, we are taught that we *are not* to judge any man; we are warned that, if we do judge others, we condemn ourselves: while in the latter, we are taught that we *are* to judge men, and to condemn some of them as no better than dogs or swine. They are to be unclean to us, unholy, contemners and despisers of that which is good; foul, greedy, sensual, devilish. In four consecutive verses we are taught that we are, and that we are not, to judge our neighbours!

And, indeed, we must do both. The one counsel is not complete without the other. Let any sage say: "You

must not judge men: you must have no opinion about them: you must accept them all as good, and treat them all as good. for what are you better than they?" and we should feel that he had given a command we could not keep. We should reply: "I do not want to be harsh and cruel in my conceptions of character. I wish to think as kindly of my neighbours as I can. But to have no opinion of them, to pronounce no verdicts on character—that is mere nonsense, whoever talks it. I *must* think about them, and come to some conclusion about them, or how should I conduct my business, or wisely order my friendships, or take my part in public life? As I consider them, I can't help seeing that one man is better than another. If I am glad to know that all men have more good in them than I can see, and some men a great deal more good than I gave them credit for, I cannot but know and admit that some men are very bad,—unclean as the dogs that roam the streets, greedy and sensual and filthy as the pigs fattening in their sty. Would you have me try to please God by shutting my eyes to the obvious facts of human life, and by pretending that I don't see what I do see?" We need not scruple to speak thus: we are in good company, in the very best. For the Lord Jesus Himself says that some men are as bad as swine and dogs, and that we are to think them as bad, and to treat them accordingly.

The one parable completes the other. But does it not contradict the other? If we say, if we only say it to ourselves, "This man is a very dog!" and, "That man is no better than a pig!" have we not both judged and condemned them?

That depends on our motive, and spirit, and intention. If we usurp the seat of judgment, and call our neighbour to our bar; and if, after we have heard the case, we say, "You are a dog, and I will lay my whip on you," obviously

we judge him ; and, judging him, condemn ourselves, since we have no right to judge him. But if we say to ourselves, "Ah, poor fellow ! he is as greedy and sensual, as dead to all that pertains to the intellect and the spirit as the pigs there in their sty ; and therefore I must do my best to help him to a higher life ; therefore, too, I must be careful how I handle him even when I try to get him out of the sty :"—if we say that, is *that* to judge him ? Is it not simply to take thought for him, and consider how we may most wisely and kindly serve him ? To a dog the holy meat of the altar is no better than carrion. To swine pearls of price are of less value than common grain : to give them pearls is not to serve them, but to exasperate them and make them hate us. And we must remember *that* when we have to deal with men who have sunk hogward or dogward. If we would do them any good, we must feed them, as God feeds us all, with food *convenient* for them, food adapted to their need and appetite. The truths which are dearest to us would be incomprehensible to them. We must meet them on their own ground, and try patiently, little by little, and step by step, to lead them higher.

When, therefore, our Lord says, "Give not the holy things to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine," He does not contradict his former saying, "Judge not, lest ye be judged." He would still have us be our neighbour's brother, not his judge. If we think, if we know, any of them to be degraded by lust and passion to the level of unclean beasts, we are not coldly to condemn them for their degradation, nor to leave them in it. Nor, on the other hand, in attempting to help and redeem them, are we to offer them hallowed things and things of price which they are sure to profane and despise, since that would be only to add to their guilt. We are, rather, to

adapt ourselves, so far as we honestly or wisely can, to their low moral conditions, to take thought and pains to adapt the truths and gifts of the Spirit to their necessities and powers.

3. And now let us read the passage once more : " Give not the holy things to the dogs ; neither cast ye your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and, turning, rend you." Have we gained any fresh insight into it? Not much, I fear. It may be hoped that some of its terms have a new and more definite meaning for us. We can now see, perhaps, that, instead of contradicting the parable of the Splinter and the Beam, it supplements that parable and makes it complete. But, nevertheless, if we were asked to define the precise meaning of the passage, to say exactly what we suppose to have been in our Lord's mind when He uttered it,—who the dogs were, and what holy things were not to be given to them ; who the swine were, and what pearls were not to be cast before them,—we might still find it hard to reply. Before we shall be in any position to reply, we must recall the main drift of the Sermon on the Mount. Here, as we might naturally expect, lies the true key to the passage : the Sermon itself interprets, as it should interpret, the several sentences of which it is composed.

As we study this Sermon we find its main topic to be the righteousness, or right rule of life, which Christ came to teach, and its immeasurable superiority over the righteousness which was the highest known to man before He came, the righteousness of the law. It opens with benedictions on virtues which were not then accounted virtues, but which are nevertheless to be the characteristic virtues of the new righteousness. It proceeds to affirm that these virtues compose a righteousness which far exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, the accepted and honoured exponents of the

Law. All through the Sermon, sometimes latent, but commonly expressed, there runs this comparison between the old righteousness and the new; until the closing parable, that of the two men, one of whom built his house on the sands, while the other got down to the rock, sets forth the fate of those who trusted in the old righteousness and of those who trusted in the new. In short, the Sermon on the Mount, besides other and diviner qualities, is a true work of art; it is as logical and sequent a discourse on one leading topic, dominated by one ruling motive, as though it had a text or thesis, and divisions, and all the customary logical forms. It is only as we keep this main topic in mind that we can interpret its parts and sentences.

We have already seen how it helps to interpret the parable of the Splinter and the Beam. When we considered that parable, we saw that the Lord had the Scribes and Pharisees and their righteousness in view. *They* were the men who, carrying beams in their own eyes, were for ever plucking at the splinters in their neighbours' eyes. "You must not do that," said Jesus to his disciples: "you must have a higher righteousness than theirs. You must not be so quick as they are to see faults in your neighbour; you must be more quick than they are to discover faults nearer home."

And it is not to be supposed that in the very next sentence of his Sermon the Master had dropped his dominant theme. He was still thinking of *their* righteousness and of the righteousness that was to exceed theirs. One characteristic feature of their righteousness, as He Himself had just pointed out,* was its ostentation. They did that which was good, "to be seen of men." They said their prayers at the corners of the streets, so timing their walk as that the hour of prayer might catch them where the throng was thickest,

* Matt. vi. 1-18.

in order that, struck by the length and fervour of their supplications, the crowd might exclaim, "O, what holy men!" When they fasted, instead of afflicting their souls and mortifying the flesh in secret, they disfigured their faces, that their sour looks might proclaim their pious austerity to all they met. They gave alms as they went in and out of the crowded gates of the Temple, or threw them into the vessels "shaped like *trumpets*"—O appropriate symbol!—which stood in or near "the Treasury," for the reception of offerings, that their shekels might rattle in the ears of men and obtain for them a good report. They had their reward. They *were* seen of men. The fame of their piety went abroad.

But were those who admired and praised them the better for it? They were the worse rather than the better. They got a false conception of piety, of religion. They came to think of it as a thing beyond *their* reach, as proper to Scribes and Pharisees, to wise men who could frame devout sentences, and austere men who could endure long fasts, and rich men who could bestow much alms. They admired it—from a distance. It did not quicken their consciences, nor touch their hearts.

The Lord Jesus had already taught his disciples that such a righteousness was self-righteousness and self-display rather than piety toward God and charity toward man; that its bad motives tainted its good deeds with corruption. He now teaches them that such a righteousness is a profanation of holy things. Prayer is the confidential intercourse of the soul with the Father who is in secret. Fasting is self-denial for benevolent and spiritual ends, not self-display. Charity is doing good hoping for nothing again; it is the hidden treasure of a spirit reconciled to God and man. To take this secret intercourse into the public streets, to turn self-denial into self-display, to parade before the multitude acts of

kindness which ceased to be kind when they were known was to give the holy things to dogs ; it was to desecrate that which was most sacred. To drag these interior and hidden treasures to the glare of day, and bid men count them up and admire them, was to cast pearls before swine. The devout and tender moods of the soul, the moods in which it rises into communion with God or confers benefits on man, were sacred, precious, inestimable. Unspiritual men could not comprehend them, nor sympathize with them : they would only turn them into a jest or whet a sneer upon them. To expose them to such treatment was to profane them, and to take nothing but loss by the profanation. It was to break through the sacred modesty and reserve in which our deepest emotions instinctively veil themselves, to make them common instead of sacred, to vulgarize and desecrate them. In fine, it was to give the holy things of the interior temple to the dogs, and to cast the pearls of the spiritual treasury to the swine.

No more emphatic confirmation of our Lord's warning can be conceived than that which the history of the Scribes and Pharisees supplies. *They* found, if ever men did, the dogs and swine only too ready to turn upon them with tusk and tooth. They aimed, not so much at being pious, as at winning a great reputation for piety. And, no doubt, there were simple and sincere souls who thought only too well of them. But the multitude were not deceived by their ostentations, simulations, or exaggerations of devotion, austerity, and charity. The common people, as we learn from the Talmud,* gave them nicknames, which prove that the Pharisees, in place of winning honour, were bringing religion into contempt. They called one sort of them *Kizai*, or "bloody-browed Pharisee," because, walking with closed eyes in order that they might not see the women they passed

* Talmud of Babylon, *Sota* 22 b.

in the streets, they were for ever bruising their foreheads against walls and pillars. Another sort they called *Medinkia*, or "the pestle Pharisee," because as a sign of modesty and humility they held themselves bent double, like the handle of the ancient pestle. Another they called *Shikmi*, or "the Pharisee of the strong shoulders," for the habit they had of walking with bent back, as though bearing the whole burden of the Law. The "*what-there-is-to-do-I-do* Pharisee," and the "*dyed* Pharisee" whose religion was soon washed out of him, were other varieties of the same class. This was how "the dogs" and "the swine" of Jewry "turned" on the Scribes and Pharisees, and "rent" them in pieces. These "hypocrites" took their fasts, their prayers, their charities into the streets; they thrust the most secret and sacred acts of the soul upon the crowd; and the crowd, instead of imitating and admiring them, turned them into a jest and theme for derisive laughter. They profaned the religious habits and emotions which they so highly valued and yet so little understood; and the crowd could see no reason why it should reverence what they had profaned.

That which the Lord Jesus here warns us against, therefore, the exact point to which, as I take it, He directs our thoughts, is that profanation of the personal religious life which consists in publishing its secrets before the world, in much talk about our moods and frames and feelings, in the ostentatious discharge of religious duties or an ostentatious observance of forms of worship. The soul is a temple; and this temple, besides that outer court of which all who care to enter it are free, and that inner court sacred to friendly feet, is also a holiest of all which should be open to none but God. Here, within the veil, there are laid up before Him "holy things," precious "pearls," the mementos of whatever is most sacred in our experience, the sacrifices we have made for Him, the self-denials by which we have sub-

dued the flesh, the charities by which we have ministered to our brethren, the gifts of grace which we have won by fervent effectual prayer ; and these are not to be laid bare to every eye, nor exposed to the coarse handling of the multitude.

In the primitive Church, when the public service was over and the faithful were separating themselves from their retiring neighbours, to gather round the table of the Lord and eat and drink with Him, the deacons of the Church cried, *τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις*, "the holy things to the holy persons," thus "fencing" the table, and warning the unbelieving and disobedient from the feast. And so often as rude feet would press into the secret places of our spiritual life, or we ourselves are tempted to profane them by parading our devotion or our charity before men, the old warning cry issues from the lips of the Master Himself, "The holy only to the Holy ;" and we "shut the door" of our "secret chamber," and speak with the Father who is in secret and who seeth in secret, and the place on which we stand becomes holy ground, and the poor dwarfed chamber is transfigured into a temple suffused with the splendours of a Divine communion.

We should greatly misunderstand our Lord did we suppose that He intends any hint against social or public worship, or in any way to suggest that the truths of the Gospel, even the most spiritual and profound, are to be concealed from the public eye. He Himself has taught us to unite in common worship, to love and value the communion of the saints. He has taught us to give the Gospel to all men as freely and as fully as it has been given to us. But, none the less, if we have a true devotion, and a true charity, if our godliness be vital, sincere, deep, it will have its reserves. We shall not place all our religion in endless talk about religion, nor in attending public means of grace, nor in outward forms or observances of any kind. There will be gracious experiences, communions, struggles, sacrifices, acts of service and

charity which will be known only to our Father : there will be pearls which we shall not cast before swine, hallowed things of the altar which we shall not give to the dogs, no, nor to our most inward friends ; just as there are sins which we shall confess to no priest but the High Priest of our profession, to no friend but the Friend who sticketh closer than a brother.

And just now, when many have so strong a faith in talk and organization and publicity as that they are losing much of the bloom and delicacy of the spiritual life ; when so many pray in public who seldom pray at home, or give donations that will be paraded in a published list, but hardly ever help a friend in secret, or rush from one religious service to another, but seldom deny themselves to serve a neighbour, —we greatly need to take our Lord's admonition to heart. The true strength of our life lies in a constant secret fellowship with Him ; and the effect of this fellowship will come out in a course of conduct more sweet and pure and gentle, rather than in much "babble," or noisy fervours, or ostentatious zeal.

If we have this hallowed life, this heavenly treasure, let us not give that which is holy to the dogs, nor cast our pearls before swine. When we fast, when we chasten our souls from their lusts, let us not be of a morose countenance, and repel men by our sour looks. Let us pray behind closed doors as well as in the open sanctuary. When we give alms, let it not be that the trumpets may sound before or after us. And for this secret righteousness our Father who seeth in secret will reward us, not openly* perhaps, but with grace, in secret, by virtue of which we shall walk before Him with a more perfect heart.

* The word "openly," or, rather, the Greek word for "openly," is not found in some of the oldest Greek MSS. at St. Matt. vi. 4, 6, and 18.

XXI.

The Parable of the Two Debtors.

ST. LUKE VII. 40—43.

THROUGHOUT his ministry the Lord Jesus spake “the *present* truth,” the truth adapted to the time and the conditions of the time. His words, his parables, were suggested by the occasion on which they were spoken, and fitted into it. Hence we can only catch the full drift of his words as we acquaint ourselves with the circumstances and the persons to whom they were addressed.

I. This parable of the Two Debtors was spoken in the house of one Simon, a Pharisee, and in the hearing of a certain woman who was a sinner, and had found, in Christ, the Friend of sinners. The two debtors of the parable *heard* the parable; he to whom little had been forgiven sat, as host, at the head of the table; she to whom much had been forgiven stood, an uninvited guest, at the feet of Christ. The story which fell from the lips of Christ was the spiritual sum and interpretation of the scene around Him. To understand the story we must glance at the scene.

Simon had invited Jesus to eat with him. We cannot tell what motive induced a Pharisee, and apparently a Pharisee of the strictest sort, to desire the company of the Nazarene who was so obnoxious to his class. It has been supposed that he was moved by gratitude; that, having been healed

by Christ, he desired to make him some slight return. For the credit of humanity let us hope that *that* is not true. It is well nigh incredible that even a Pharisee should deal so niggardly and hardly with a benefactor as Simon dealt with Jesus. Let us rather hope that he had been struck with some passing word uttered by Him who spake as never man spake, and had resolved to examine—and as a ruler and teacher of the people he was bound to examine—the claims of Jesus for himself.

But whatever the motive of the invitation, Jesus accepts the invitation—mark the grace and comfort of that—and comes into the Pharisee's house. Mark the grace and comfort of Christ's acceptance of the Pharisee's hospitality, whatever its motive; for it teaches us to hope and believe that on any invitation; however poor and unworthy, He will come to us, and come to give us as much as we can take. If there be but a single spark of holy desire burning amid manifold obstructions in our hearts, He will come and seek to fan it to a flame.

The Pharisee asks Jesus to his house, but the Sinner comes unasked into the presence of Jesus. We need not curiously inquire into *her* motive. It is clear and patent. Love is her inspiration, the love of one who has sinned much, and to whom much has been forgiven. It seems strange to us that a woman of her evil notoriety should be allowed to enter the guest-chamber of a rigid moralist, a strict Pharisee. But a slight acquaintance with the social customs of the East—where often the meals are all but public, and all comers welcome; where, as the lowest slave or peasant may rise to be a minister of state, our class distinctions are unknown, and the feeling of a common humanity is infinitely stronger than with us—greatly detracts from the strangeness. In her earnest longing and devotion, too, she would *make* a way, if she could not find one, to His

presence whom she loved much, and whose service was her new chief joy.

And she *did* love Him. He probably had spoken the first words of a pure tenderness that she had heard for many years, and taught that weary heart, weary with its long straying, to find rest. He had shewn her the possibilities of virtue still open to her, and had lifted up a gate of hope when her dark path seemed all closed in. And she, poor outcast, is wholly won to his service. She lavishes on Him every mark of love and reverence. Standing behind Him as He reclined at table, she weeps at the memory of his redeeming goodness, her tears falling on his feet. Then the tear-stained feet must be dried, and she wipes them with her unpent hair, thin now, perchance, and with many a streak of premature grey. Stooping to wipe his feet, she takes courage to press them with her polluted lips, and finds a cleansing virtue in those blessed feet which were nailed, for our advantage, to the bitter cross. It is a pathetic scene; and that incident of the dishevelled tresses is of a tender beauty not easily matched. "The hair," says St. Paul, "is the glory of the woman," and this glory she devotes to his service whose forgiving love had made her a "woman" once more. *What is highest and best in us is baser than that which is lowest in Christ*, finds its true honour in subjection to Him, its true use in doing Him service. We may well give our "glory" to Him who for us gave up the glory He had with the Father before the world was.

The Lord Jesus does not shrink even from the harlot's touch and adoration. *He* knows what it all means; that lips, which cannot speak for sighs, are faltering out love in kisses; that, in breaking the alabaster box and anointing his feet with the costly ointment with which she once adorned herself, she is renouncing her evil courses, seizing the kingdom of heaven with a forcible convulsive grasp; that, in

devoting the glory of her hair, she is devoting her whole body, soul, and spirit to his service. Jesus, the Saviour, does not shrink ; but Simon, the Pharisee, does. *He* cannot read the thoughts and intents of the heart. He has no conception of a pollution which is not external and notorious, or of a holiness which is not formal. He is shocked, indignant—sees only the sinner in the penitent : he is perplexed and bewildered—cannot understand how any man who pretends to be religious and a teacher of religion should suffer the vile to approach him. But, though he is perplexed, he does not ask for an explanation. Like the Pharisee he was, he begins to “speak *within himself*”—to chop logic, to utter harsh hasty condemnations. He frames this dilemma in his thoughts :—“This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman she is that toucheth him ; for”—and one can imagine with what an air of intense virtuous disgust he would draw himself up—“she is a sinner. He is not a prophet if he *does not* know what she is, for the prophet is a discerner of spirits ; and he is not a prophet if he *does* know what she is, for no prophet would suffer the touch of one so vile.”

Ah ! he did not know that of which he spake. Yet there is something to be said for him. We cannot expect even a Pharisee to be wiser than his generation—though too often he affects to be at least that—or than his class. And the Jews and Pharisees of his day held that every prophet was a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and that the greatest of the prophets, the Messiah, would possess this divine instinct in its full perfection. In the Messiah they, like Simon, expected one who would know what was in them, and not need that any should testify of them. Hence Nathanael, so soon as Jesus had shewn Himself master of his spiritual secret, cries, “Whence knowest thou

me?" and at once concludes, "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." Hence also the Samaritans, so soon as they are persuaded that Jesus can tell them "all that ever they did," instantly acknowledge Him to be "the Christ of God." Hence, too, Simon shapes his dilemma, "This can never be the Prophet sent from God; for either he does not know this woman what she is, and then he has not the prophetic gift; or knowing her, he suffers her to touch him, and then he has not the prophetic sanctity." It was not bad logic for a Pharisee. It indicates that he was doing his proper work—testing the claims of one who claimed to be both a Prophet and a Saviour. It indicates also that he *was* a Pharisee rather than a man, and had lost the power to do that work. He knows not, he is no longer capable of judging, either the woman, or the Prophet, or himself. All his conclusions are erroneous: in the penitent woman he sees only an abandoned, irredeemable sinner; he supposes himself to be better than she is, and wiser than Jesus; he virtually affirms that the true Prophet is not and cannot be the Friend of Sinners. There is something to be said for him, but not much. He was, perhaps, trying to do his duty, but all the *man* being swallowed up in the Jew and the Pharisee, he was no longer capable of doing it.

To the inward process of Simon's thought the Lord Jesus replies with the parable of the Two Debtors. There is much grace and condescension in this reply. Simon had invited Jesus to his house, yet had not treated Him with the usual courtesies and honours shewn to a guest—had saluted Him with no kiss, given Him no water for his feet, poured no fragrant nard upon his head. At his own table he had sat in harsh judgment on the Guest to whom he had been openly rude—first treating Him as an inferior, and then inwardly condemning Him as an impostor. But Jesus does not meet open rudeness with open rebuke. He stoops to vindicate Him-

self, and hides even his vindication in a parable, the key to which only Simon held. Not only does He spare the Pharisee an open humiliation, He also affords him the very proof for which he was asking. Simon had secretly said within himself, This man is no prophet, for He cannot read character and thought. And Jesus replies by reading *his* character, by answering his unspoken thoughts. Was not this a very gracious Guest and Teacher?

But his fidelity is equal to his grace, and is indeed a part of it. The Parable sets forth very plainly the spiritual condition both of the Pharisee and the Penitent. "Thou and she, both are sinners, both debtors, though one may owe more than the other, and neither of you is able to pay his debt. You cannot meet the claim for fifty pence any more than she can meet the claim for five hundred pence." This was faithful speaking, surely; and would have been a most surprising revelation to Simon had he carried an open ear. *He* a sinner—he, the devout Pharisee, who gave tithes of all he possessed! *He* not able to pay his way with God—he, who rather thought God in debt to him!

And after this fidelity what mercy, what tenderness are in the words, "And when they had nothing to pay, *he frankly forgave them both!*" Ah, Simon, if ear and heart were open now, how happy were you, how blessed!

The dealing of Christ with this blind Pharisee is very admirable. But is his dealing with us less admirable? Nay, verily: for He comes to us as he went to Simon, meeting *our* thought to widen it, supplying our want to deepen it. If we are trying to discover the true Prophet, or the true Faith, or the true good of life, He will help us, giving us truth as we are able to bear it, but making every fresh discovery of truth a mean to larger discoveries. If we are exercised in *our* thoughts and desires about any one

form of good or truth, longing for *that* and speaking of that within ourselves, He will give us that ; but, having received it, we shall find it deepen the very want it supplies, and excite new stronger cravings for truth and goodness. So, too, if Jesus came to Simon to convince him of sin, and then to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, He comes in like manner to us. As we listen to his word we, to our no small surprise and consternation, find that we have run in debt to God and have "nothing to pay" our debt with ; the sense of sin oppresses and afflicts us ; and even as we are foreboding arrest and judgment, lo, He comes again, to announce a frank forgiveness, to cancel our debt and set us free !

The Pharisee is very hard of hearing. Simon does not profit by the courtesy and grace of Christ. Although the parable was introduced by the emphatic words, "Simon, I have somewhat to say to *thee*," he does not take it as addressed to him, or as having any bearing on his spiritual condition. When the Lord Jesus, having spoken the parable, asks, "Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" he calmly answers, as one who has no personal interest in the question, "I judge him to whom most was forgiven." Delicate courtesy and indirect rebuke having failed to awaken the man slumbering within the Pharisee, the Lord Jesus breaks through all reserve and utters open rebuke. This, too, is part and parcel of his love. For, surely, if a man be hard of hearing, so that when you speak gently to him he cannot gather what yet it gravely concerns him to know, it is the part of kindness to raise one's voice and speak to him in loud tones, even though the tones be somewhat shrill and harsh. If a man is deeply in debt, but, negligent of habit and careless of accounts, does not know that he owes a debt, is it not more friendly to make him listen while you tell him how deeply he is involved, even though you can only beat down his negligence with severity,

than to let him remain ignorant of his condition till the officer hale him before the judge, and the judge cast him into a prison from which there is no release till the uttermost farthing be paid?

In love, then, Christ utters open rebuke. "He turned to the woman and said, Seest thou this woman?" Simon had not seen *the woman* yet; as yet, he had seen only the sinner. Look, then, on the woman at last, O Pharisee. Look upon her in the light of the parable you have just heard. Look on thyself too, for as yet thou hast not seen thyself—the Pharisee hiding the man from thy incurious eyes. She! does not she love much? And you, how much do you love? You gave no water to the weary Master, though that be the common rite of hospitality. You saluted Him with no kiss, though that be the common sign of friendship and welcome. You poured no fragrant ointment on his head, though that be the common sign of joy and festivity. You have sat noting his every action with austere eyes, judging and misjudging Him in your heart. But this woman, this sinner, O righteous Pharisee, has repaired all thy omissions. For water she has washed his feet with tears, wiping them with the tangled tresses of her hair. For the kiss on cheek and brow, she has not ceased to kiss his feet. For the oil of anointing, she has brought the precious ointment which once enhanced her beauty. In place of judging and misjudging, she has worshipped Him, lavishing on Him every token of a pure reverent love. She loves much—and her love is the open sign of her forgiveness. Thou poor blind Pharisee! If love be the proof of forgiveness, how much hast *thou*, loving so little, been forgiven?

Let us take warning by the example of Simon. For if the gracious accents of love and invitation do not move us, Christ will "change his voice." As we grow deaf, his voice will sound rougher and louder for He loves us too much

not to make us hear ; till at last, if we harden ourselves against Him, and *will not* hear his voice, it will peal through the trump of judgment, and awaken us with terrible shocks of surprise. It is our happiness to have a gentle Teacher—a Teacher who does not, unless our obstinate inattention compel Him, “lift up his voice.” But if we will not listen, if we will not yield to the gentler ministries of his grace, and follow the impulses to obedience quickened in us by his love, He can, simply because he loves us, be very stern, and speak in tones of rebuke which we cannot help but hear.

And, on the other hand, if we listen, his voice grows ever sweeter, his bearing more gracious. The woman who was a sinner gained no immediate response to her service. Christ speaks to Simon before He speaks to her. But when He turns from the Pharisee to the Penitent, how tender and gracious are the words of his mouth. *He gives her absolution*: “Thy sins, though many, are forgiven.” *He teaches her truth*: “Thy faith hath saved thee.” *He urges her to duty*: “Go in peace.” And in these three words spoken to the penitent harlot, we have the abstract and brief chronicle of his dealings with us. His voice, the voice which at first rebuked us for our sins, grows very tender so soon as we confess our sins with a contrite heart, and renounce the evil habits of our life. Whether we owe much or little, this Gracious Creditor frankly forgives us—*frankly*; there is no reserve in his pardon, He is wholly reconciled to us. “Thy sins, whether many or few, are all forgiven thee,” is the absolution He pronounces on all who truly repent them of their sins. And, to absolution, He adds instruction. Just as He taught the poor woman to whom He forgave so much that it was not her regret for the past by which she was saved, nor her good resolves for the future, but that *faith* which had instantly closed with his

offer of grace, and which, linking on her life to his, had secured strength for purity; so also He early teaches us that we are saved by faith, that our faith is the victory which overcomes the world, that only as we are one with Him by vital faith can we either be redeemed from past offences or strengthened for the trials which await us. And, to instruction, He adds command. We are not to stay weeping at his feet, or rapt in the joy of an intimate communion with Him. The world of duty awaits us. We are to go back into it, and do all things as unto Him, that we may enter into peace. By a happy accident the very last word flashed along the first electric wire that was laid between England and America was "Forward." And this is the first and last word of the Master to those who believe, "Forward." Don't stand weeping over-long about the sinful past. Don't be overmuch taken up with present joys. Redeem the time. Use the hours as they pass. Forget that which is behind. Reach forth to that which is before. Live so that each to-morrow find you further than to-day.

II. Now this Parable suggests a question of grave importance, a question the answer to which branches out into many forms of practical truth. Indeed the question is suggested both by the Parable and by the Narrative of which it forms part. In the Parable, the Debtor who owes five hundred pence seems to have the advantage over the Debtor who owes but fifty. More is forgiven him, and he loves more; he is quit of the larger debt, and proves the better man. In the Narrative, the Woman who is a sinner seems, in like manner, to have the advantage over the man who is a Pharisee, the harlot over the devotee. She is more open to the words of Christ, and, once forgiven, shews incomparably the warmer love. Now if this Parable and Narrative stood alone, if they were not backed up by

many passages in the Gospels which leave the same impression on our minds, we might not care to raise the question, Whether or not it is well to have sinned much—whether the greatest love springs from the most heinous transgressions, just as the fairest flowers and most fruitful trees spring from a plentifully manured soil? But they do not stand alone. The impression they make is deepened as we listen to other Parables, as we turn to other Narratives. Looking into the glass of the Word, we perpetually see publicans and harlots pressing into the kingdom of God before rulers and righteous men. Listening to the songs of heaven, we constantly hear the richer tones of a profounder joy over one sinner reclaimed from the error of his ways than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. In the Parable of the Two Sons, as in that of the Two Debtors, the advantage seems to lie with the more sinful and rebellious. The Son who when invited to work in his father's vineyard replies, "I go, sir," never gets there; while the Son who says, "I will not," afterward repented and went. So, again, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Elder Brother who has served his father many years, who has never strayed from home nor at any time transgressed his father's commandment,—for him no music sounds, no feast is spread, he has never had so much as a kid that he might make merry with his friends; but no sooner does the Younger Brother return, the Prodigal who had wandered into a far country and wasted his substance in riotous living, than the best robe is brought forth, the fatted calf is killed, and the whole house is ablaze with festive lights and trembles to the merry dance. So, once more, in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican: the Publican who has broken both the moral and the ceremonial law is preferred before the Pharisee who, if somewhat lifted up at the thought of his unwonted virtue,

has nevertheless an unusual virtue to boast, in that he is free from the sins of the market and the flesh, in that he is neither an extortioner nor an adulterer, and has diligently laboured for that righteousness which is of the Law. So that many passages, many parables, tend in the same direction, and give the preference to the vile and sinful over the moral and the righteous; law-breakers have the upper hand of the law-abiding: and those who have plunged into the foul sty of fleshly lusts seem nearer to heaven—for love *is* heaven—than those who loathe it and flee from it.

Is it, then, an advantage to have offended much, to have gone far and deep into sin? Is abstinence from gross transgressions an evil rather than a good? Is it credible that the more a man has laid waste the nobler faculties and passions of the soul, yoking them to fleshly lusts which war against the soul, that the more deeply he has sunk into the slough of self-will and sensuality—and sin includes all this:—is it credible that the man who has done all this is thereby made the more capable of rising to the full height of the nature he has abused, and exercising that love which likens man to God? It is *not* credible. To suppose it credible is to utter a monstrous libel against God and man. Nevertheless the utterances and parables which seem to support this view subserve a most useful purpose; they contain truths which we are very apt to neglect, and suggest warnings of which we stand in constant need.

1. For observe, first, that Flagrant Sinners are much more likely to discover that they are Sinners than Moralists and Ritualists. It is much more probable that the man who owes five hundred *denarii*—about £180 of our money—will perceive that he is in debt, and be impressed with a sense of his indebtedness, than the man who owes fifty *denarii*, or about £18. The notorious harlot, the extor-

tionate publican, whom all their neighbours regard as sinners, making no secret of their opinion, are much more likely to acknowledge their transgression, and have their sin always before them, than the strict Pharisee whom all the neighbours hold to be a saint. It is nothing wonderful that, of the Two Sons, he who said, "I will not go," when asked to work in the father's vineyard, afterward repented and went; or that he who said, "I go, sir," quite meaning it at the moment, afterward changed his mind and did not go: the offence of the first was so flagrant, so glaring, that, when his passion cooled, he could hardly fail to see it and repent of it; while the second if, when on his way to the vineyard, he were tempted to turn aside to some more pleasant occupation, could always comfort himself with his good intention, and, because he meant to go, fail to see the sin of not going after all. It is quite in harmony with our experience of human nature that the poor Prodigal, all his substance wasted—homeless, foodless, smitten with despair, should long for the comfort and plenty of his father's house; and that the obedient homekeeping Brother should quite forget both that he had ever broken any commandment and that he had enjoyed all his father's goods as though they had been his own. It is not better to owe five hundred pence than fifty, to be an extortionate Publican rather than a religious Pharisee, a Prodigal rather than an obedient son. But, nevertheless, it is very true that the larger our debt the more likely we are to be oppressed by it; that the worse our life the more likely we are to confess how bad it is; that the farther we have strayed from it the more likely we are to long for the home we have forsaken, and to return to it. It is very true that, if we owe little, we are in danger of forgetting that we owe anything; that, if our life has been in the main right, we are in danger of forgetting how often we have been quite wrong in heart and motive;

that, if we have been on the whole dutiful sons, we are in danger of forgetting that our obedience has been far from perfect. And *these* are the truths set forth in the Parables of our Lord. They yield no encouragement to sin; but they discover the peril of those very just persons who, while they judge flagrant sinners very harshly, suppose that *they* have no need of repentance. To these the Parables yield a very grave and a very necessary admonition.

2. Observe, secondly, that the Much and the Little of Sin are for the most part Measures of Conscience, not of Iniquity. The Woman who was a sinner had openly violated the laws of God and man, and at last had become bitterly conscious of her sin. The man who was a Pharisee had kept friends with the world and the world's law—outwardly at least, and on the whole. But though he had not openly broken through the hedge of God's commandments, he was covertly creeping along it on the farther side, or coming and going through the gaps which other men had made. Scrupulous in the matter of tithes and ceremonies, yet, if any of the fathers had made void the commandments of God with their vain traditions, he did not scruple to follow the fathers. He was self-confident when he ought to have been humble. He was hard in his judgments, narrow in his views, utterly mistaken in his interpretations of character. Though the Woman weeps bitter tears of penitence, he can only see the sinner in her, not the penitent. Though Jesus speaks a parable expressly to him and about him, he does not catch its drift, his mind not being open to the truth. Though the Son of Man came, as the holy prophets foretold, to seek and to save that which was lost, no sooner does He permit one of the lost to touch Him than Simon concludes Him an impostor and no prophet. There he sits, looking with austere eyes on a scene that might well have touched his heart, and condemn-

ing with self-righteous indignation. One whose sandals he had not troubled himself, and was not worthy, to unloose. He is wholly lacking, though he be so pious a man, in humility, in insight, in charity; but, because he sins in a decorous religious way, he has no sense of his defects, no consciousness of his sins. After all, he was deeper in God's debt than the poor harlot whom he scorned. His circumstances had been happier, his temptations not so great. The best teaching, and the holiest influences of the time were at his command. But he takes the good and perfect gifts lavished upon him simply as the reward of his virtue: he does not perceive that they all come down from the Father of Lights, and that, as they all come from God, he owes all to God. And, despite his advantages and gifts, he has sunk into the most inward and fatal sins—those sins of the spirit which are far harder to eradicate than sins of the flesh. He is arrogant, vindictive, intolerant. He cannot recognize truth even when Truth Incarnate speaks with him. He is insensible to the touch of Divine Love. He is all fenced about with dogma, all hardened with spiritual pride.

So, again, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Elder Brother has never wandered from his father's home: but, oh, how far has *he* wandered from his father's heart who, when the mansion is all aflame with joy, wanders in the darkness without and will not go in! He prides himself on being a dutiful son; but where is his duty now that he meets his father's tender entreaties with sullen reproach? How can he be a good son who is so bad a brother? *He* has never known the misery of remorse, of wasted years, of a hopeless future. He has been always in the father's house. Yet, after all, has he so much of his father's spirit as the Prodigal who, that he may re-enter the home, will beg the place and duty of a hired servant?

Ah! the debtor who has been forgiven much, and who loves much, is not always he who owed most. It is he who dwells on his debt, broods over it, magnifies it and the difficulty of meeting it, whom it galls and frets like a daily and well-nigh insupportable burden, whom it follows through rain and sunshine, fair weather and foul, dogging his steps like an apparition, cleaving to him like a curse. And hence it is that a noble David, in the agony of his remorse, has his sin ever before him, and can see only *that*; and a nobler Paul, in his deep self-humiliation, accounts himself the very chief of sinners. The debt may not seem large to others, but it is much to *him*; he groans under the intolerable strain, and when it is removed, breaks out into the tears and songs of a sacred rapture, a joy too deep to be expressed. And the debtor to whom little is forgiven is not so much he who little needs forgiveness as he who does not feel how much he needs it, who does not make conscience of sin, whose heart is hardened against the impact of truth and goodness; who therefore can listen to Christ and sit with Him, and yet not love Him much, giving Him no eager greeting, no cordial welcome, because not conscious of the magnitude of the redemption He has wrought.

The way to love much is not to sin much, but to think much of sin. The best people think most of it; those who most strive against it have, and must have, the profoundest sense of its power. For so long as we yield to any force, natural or spiritual, our task is easy and pleasant. It is not till we try to sail *against* the wind, or row *against* the stream, or swim *against* the current, that we discover the strength of the force opposed to us. And in like manner, it is not till we contend against evil, that we learn its power and our weakness. To do that which is right seems easy only to those who do wrong; once make the attempt, and you will change your thought. To overcome a sin may not seem so

difficult while we yield to it; but, the conflict once begun, you will find that with all your energy, unless your energy be reinforced from above, you cannot stand against it. And hence it is that those who are in the field against evil acknowledge its terrible malignant power, while those who are still at ease in the tents of sin make very light of it. Once try to get out of debt to your Heavenly Creditor, and though you may owe only fifty pence, the fifty will oppress you till they seem five hundred or five thousand; you will know no peace until, confessing you have "nothing to pay," He frankly forgives you all.

3. Observe, thirdly, that Christ does not teach us to run into Sin, but to hate Hypocrisy—the worst of Sins. It is not the evil life of the Harlot, but her "much love" which He approves; nor the extortion of the Publican, but his penitence and humility. To meet God's commands with a blunt "I will not" is flat mutiny and rebellion, even though we afterward repent and obey. To travel into the far country remote from Him is not a virtue, but a vice of blood and will which He will scourge out of us with famine and irksome bondage. To run into debt in the hope of after gain is to forfeit both present and future good. To rush into sin in the hope that, when at last we are forgiven much, we shall love the more, is the death of all love. But, on the other hand, there are worse sins than those which go before to judgment—sins which under a show of godliness eat into the very life of the soul, and from which even judgments can very hardly redeem us. Simon has no doubt that he loves God, and God him; yet how *can* he love the God whom he has not seen while he does not love the brother or sister whom he has seen, nay, will hardly acknowledge that he is of one blood with them? The Pharisee may have lived a more legal and cleanly life than the Publican; but how dwelleth the love of God in him who even in the temple can boast of his conspicuous virtues,

and glance with sovereign contempt at the humble Penitent who beats upon his breast and has no language but a cry for mercy? Even though you afterward come to a better mind it is a heinous offence to say "I will not" to God; but is it not a still more heinous offence to say "I go, Sir," and yet not to go? to hide a disobedient heart under the outward shows of deference and submission? to mock God as well as to disobey Him? If the Prodigal Son be an open and notorious sinner, is there not even a deeper taint of self-will in the Elder Son who sits in judgment on both father and brother and condemns both—the one for his leniency and the other for offences repented and renounced? Alas! we are all of us ready enough to condemn those who fall into gross sensual transgressions, albeit they may have learned a loathing for them we can never know; and far too ready to condone the offences of those who have a subtle unloving heart, if only they make a fair show in the flesh. The man who frequents the temple, and pays his tithes, and falls into no flagrant violations of the world's law, is a thriving and approved man, even though he give few signs of a true spiritual life, and be lacking in humility, in charity, in loyalty to truth,—even though he make himself the standard by which all men are to be measured, or backbite and devour his neighbours, or sit in judgment on men more spiritual and catholic than himself. And therefore we have great need to remember that, though the very Church herself be loud in the praise of such men as this, Christ, the Lord of the Church, met them with the severest rebukes and threatenings that ever fell from his gracious lips. It was *the religious men*, the men who occupied the chief seats in the synagogue and held themselves to be the very pink of orthodoxy, whom he denounced as a "generation of vipers," and menaced with the deep "damnation of hell." For it is the subtle spiritual sins—the pride, the ignorance,

the uncharity, which hide themselves under the cloak of godliness, that are most offensive to God and injurious to man. To indulge in these is to misrepresent God, and to keep men from the open paths which lead to his love and service. It is to incur the heaviest debt of all, and to be at the farthest remove from confessing, or so much as perceiving, that we have "nothing to pay" with—at the farthest remove, therefore, from the frank forgiving mercy of God.

4. Nor, finally, must we omit specially to note that Christ specially warns us against forming those Hard Judgments of our Brethren, which of all Men the "unco' guid" are most apt to form. Simon could hardly fail to see that his life had been outwardly purer than that of the Woman who was a sinner; and, seeing this, he forthwith condemns her, and Christ for suffering her to touch Him. He could not see, he did not care to see, the penitence which was washing away the stains of former guilt, the profound love which was strengthening her for future obedience. The Pharisee knew Publicans to be extortionate; but had he heard the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" and thought what *that* meant, even he could hardly have used "this Publican" to point his pious boast. The Elder Brother knew that the Prodigal had fled from home and wasted his substance in vicious riot; but he did not see that the man had come back all broken with remorse, yet all healed with humility and the strong resolve to amend. Had he not been "out in the field"—looking very sharply, no doubt, after the labourers on the estate, and keeping them well up to the mark—when the younger Brother faltered out the prayer, "Make me as one of thy hired servants;" had he gone into the house and seen the well-known form all wasted with passion and drawn by famine, even his cold heart might have glowed with fraternal love and pity. It is our ignorance of men, our partial knowledge, the prejudice

which *will* see only their offences against Heaven and us, which lie at the bottom of most of our hard judgments. We know very little of one another, and often not the best ; yet we pronounce our hasty verdicts as though we had studied the whole case.

But those who have themselves received mercy should be merciful ; we have been forgiven that we may forgive : those who know God best are most like Him. And the strange thing is, that those who assume to know most of Him, who are most assured of *their* forgiveness, who are loudest in their boast of Heavenly Mercy, are often the most austere, the most unmerciful, the most unforgiving in their thoughts and judgments of others. Even though God has frankly remitted their debt of five hundred pence, they can hardly believe that he will remit their neighbour's debt of fifty. With the beam full in their own eye, they go about tilting at the motes in their brother's eye, knowing neither themselves nor him.

Now God loves us all, even the evil and unthankful, and would have us all to be saved. And therefore he takes it as a wrong done to Him if we despair of any man whom He has made, and for whom, as for us, Christ has died. Instead of judging them, He would have us judge ourselves. Instead of condemning them, He would have us assure them of his mercy by the mercy we shew them. Instead of breaking the reed already bruised, He would have us bind it up. Instead of quenching the smoking flax, He would have us fan it to a flame. We may accept it as an axiom of the spiritual life, that we never shew ourselves so unlike God, never provoke Him to a keener anger, than when we hinder any who are seeking his mercy by our unmercifulness : and that we are never more fully in his spirit and favour than when by our compassion we convey the sense of his forgiving love to the broken and contrite heart.

And, therefore, I am emphatically speaking in the spirit of my Master when I invite you all, even the most sinful, even those most oppressed with a sense of guilt, to rejoice in a Love which only waits for the first weak motion of penitence, in order to pour out the healing comforting tides of a forgiveness that knows no bound. Only come, confessing that you owe Him much and have "nothing to pay," and your merciful Creditor will frankly forgive your debt, whether it be fifty or five hundred pence. Only return to the Gracious Father from whom you have wandered, and He will recognize you while yet you are a great way off, and run to meet you; all heaven shall be merry with music and dancing because you have at last come to a better mind: and the Elder Brother, so far from grudging you the fatted calf, or the new best robe, will rejoice over you with a joy peculiar and divine.

XXII.

The Stilling of the Tempest.

MATT. VIII. 23—27; MARK IV. 35—41; LUKE VIII. 22—25.

THE Lake of Gennesaret, like most inland seas, though commonly lying in tranquil beauty in its rocky basin, is at times swept by sudden and dangerous storms. The wind, rushing wildly through the tortuous mountain gorges, and often baffled by them, at last swoops down upon the Lake. Confined by the surrounding rocks, which are lofty and precipitous, it finds no outlet, but goes whirling round and round, beating against its barriers of stone, and raising a tempest which puts the little fishing-boats flying over the surface of the Lake into no small jeopardy. It was one of these sudden dangerous storms which disturbed the Master's rest, a rest of which He had sore need. We learn from St. Mark, that He had spent the day in speaking parables to a vast multitude on the slope of a mountain on the Galilean side of the Lake, and in afterwards expounding them to his disciples. At last, when the evening was come, worn out with incessant exhausting labour, He enters the boat, goes to the stern, and falls quietly asleep, his head resting on the stern-rail. Before they reach the opposite Gadarene shore, the storm pounces on them, the little fishing-boat heels over and rapidly fills with water; even the fishermen among the Twelve, familiar with all the changes and perils of the Lake from boyhood, are alarmed. The peril is great, imminent;

yet, in his fatigue, the Master sleeps peacefully through the tumult, undisturbed by the roar of the elements, by the water which floats his robe, by the spray which dashes on his face. But though unmoved by the piercing shrieks of the wind and the hoarse menace of the waves, He wakes at the first cry of his disciples. He reassures and comforts them ; He rebukes the raving wind and the raging sea : the tumult subsides into a calm deep and unruffled as his own.

It was the ark of Christendom which rode that flood ; and in the ark there was a better Noah, the true "rest" and "comfort" of Jehovah, destined to begin a new and higher life for the world. Another sign than that of Jonah was given to that generation—the sign of Jesus, in the dove-like calm that slept through the storm, and hushed even the storm to sleep : Jonah was the danger, Jesus the safety, of the ship : Jonah, ill-named the dove, was rather the stormy petrel which bred and foretold the tempest ; Jesus was the true dove, speaking of a new world in which all the tempests of life should sink into a great calm.

Jesus sleeps and wakes :—He is a man, then, and a man subject to our infirmities. Yet He is more than man : for He sleeps through the peril which would not suffer his disciples to rest, and awakes with divine composure, though the boat is fast filling with water, and the night is dark, and the storm loud, and cries of distress are ringing in his ears. Lifting his serene head from its rude pillow, He takes in the whole significance of the scene at a glance. He is not alarmed by the threatening imminent danger, nor fluttered by the panic of his friends. Nay, as St. Matthew reports, near and imminent as the danger is, He pauses to rebuke and calm the tempest raging in the heart of his disciples before He rebukes the wind and the sea, and is more con-

cerned at their lack of faith than at the peril He and they are in. He was a man of like passions with us ; and yet, as we remember his divine self-possession and composure, we may well cry, "What manner of man is this !"

Critics, with that keen eye for flaws which we can only admire at a respectful distance, have been much concerned at the various and different terms in which the three Evangelists record the outcry of the alarmed disciples. Luke reports that they cried, "Master, Master, we perish !" Mark, that they cried, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish ?" Matthew, that they cried, "Lord, save us, we perish !" And these three cries do obviously denote different states of mind.

The critical concern has deepened when the various reports of Christ's reply to this various appeal have been compared. Mark reports that He said, "How is it that ye have no faith ?" Luke, that He said, "Where is your faith ?" Matthew, that He said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith ?"

On the ground of these serious variations in their several reports, the accuracy, and even the veracity, of the Evangelists have been impugned ! One almost scorns to answer such a charge ; it betrays an entire absence of that acumen and historical imagination which are the prime requisites of the critical art. Were a dozen men, imperilled and alarmed by darkness and tempest, sinking in a sinking boat, bound, or likely, to use precisely the same words, to wake their Friend with an accordant chant as though they were uttering a liturgical response ? Were they not likely to be animated by a common feeling indeed, but a feeling which would vary according to their several characters, and to express that feeling in any words that first came to their lips ? Was it improbable that some of them should say, "Master, Master,

we perish!" feeling that to Him it was enough merely to state their danger, and marking its urgency by their repetition of the word "Master?" Was it improbable that others of them, half frantic with fear, should upbraid Him even as they appealed to Him, and cry reproachfully, "Master, *carest Thou not* that we perish?" Was it improbable that still others should retain their confidence in his power and grace, even in that supreme moment, and cry, "Lord, save us, we perish?" Instead of cavilling at these variations, we should rather be thankful for them, since they indicate the different characters of the men who were with Christ in the vessel, and make our conception of the scene at once more graphic and complete. Instead of urging them as an argument against the veracity or accuracy of the Evangelists, in the fact that these men pourtray themselves in the undignified posture of fear, that they confess how much they were lacking in faith, we ought rather to find new proofs of their honesty and the transparent fidelity of their reports.

But if the disciples broke on the Master with three different cries, can we suppose that He made them three distinct answers? O fools and slow of heart that we are to ask, or to be troubled by, such questions as that! Grant that our Lord answered their various appeal with a single sentence, and that no one of the Evangelists has given us the exact words He used:—what then? He recognized the separate tones of their appeal; He read and responded to the thoughts of all their hearts. He spake to them by voice, and look, and gesture no less than by his words. And as they listened to his single sentence, what more natural than that each of them should find in it an exact response to his mood? "How is it that ye have no faith?" "Where is your faith?" "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" *No faith, little faith, unready faith, i.e., faith laid aside for the moment and out of reach*—this is what the different disciples

heard in his rebuke, whatever the actual form He gave it. Was it not natural, inevitable? Can you not tell, almost as certainly as though you had been in the boat with them, which of the disciples would hear one rebuke and which another? Are you not sure, for instance, that slow sceptical Thomas, in so sore a strait, would have no faith, and give all up for lost? and that Peter, in so sudden a strait, would be apt to find his faith had slipped for the instant beyond his reach? while John, even in so sudden and sore a strait, would have a little faith—faith enough to keep him from upbraiding the Lord, and to impel the appeal, “Lord, save us, we perish?”

And, after all, however various the tones or words the Apostles heard, or thought they heard, they all learned the great lesson of the Master's rebuke. Read which of the Gospels you will, you feel that the gist and substance of the rebuke was, that there was no need for fear while He was with them, that if they had had faith, or faith enough, they would not have feared. This is the great lesson of the rebuke, the common lesson—that Faith is the conquering opposite of Fear. Suppose the worst had come to the worst with them; suppose the boat had filled and gone down, and the whole Apostolic company had been drowned in the tempest—what harm would that have done them? It would but have taken them home. We might have been the poorer for it, but not they; our loss would have been their gain. Why, even we, every time we stand beside the grave in which we have laid a brother's dust, give God our hearty thanks for that it hath pleased Him of his great mercy “to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world,” and from “the burden of the flesh,” to dwell with Him “in joy and felicity.” Do we mean what we say? What then have we to fear? We have overcome “the last enemy.” We should not fear, if only we had faith,

or more than a little faith, or if our faith were ready to our hand. Faith makes the unseen realities visible and clear to us. Faith makes eternal truths present facts. It shews us that loss is gain, that to lose our life is to find it, that to lay aside the burden of the flesh is to be clothed upon with a spiritual and incorrupt body, that to leave the cares of time is to enter on the pleasures which are for evermore. And, therefore, perfect faith, like perfect love, casts out fear. Christ never feared anything: He did not fear poverty, change, loss, or death, nor the leper's touch, nor the spring of the demoniac who clanked his broken chain among the tombs, nor the wild wrestle of wind and sea: why should we fear aught that may befall us, when death itself will but take us to "God, who is our home?" Might not the Master well rebuke us, and say with mingled surprise and regret, "How is it that ye have no faith?" or "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"

The Apostles had some faith! or why did they cry to Jesus to save them—why look to Him rather than to a bold and skilful sailor like Peter? but they had not much faith, or ready faith, or they would not have feared. Perhaps they could not find their faith, *because it was so dark*. For it is at night that we are most subject to fear. We cannot find our faith just when we most need it, when we cannot see and measure our danger, when we are most helpless. That is to say, we cannot depend on God just when we are most dependent on Him, when we lie most completely at his mercy. But if we fear, if we cannot trust God in the dark night, is not that a proof that our fearlessness in the day springs rather from self-trust than trust in God? God is as near us in the night as in the day. He never slumbers nor sleeps that He may watch over and keep us while we sleep. And the night puts, not our courage only, but our faith

to the test. It is easy to be quiet and assured in the broad daylight, when we can see, and act, and defend ourselves. If it is not so easy at night, if we are then easily moved to apprehension and distrust, because only God can see our danger and defend us from it—what does that mean? Does it not mean that, after all, we rely more on our own wisdom and strength than on his, that we walk by sight, rather than by faith?

So, too, in the night of sorrow, and loss, and bereavement, we are put to the test, and taught to know ourselves. If, when we are smitten with a tempest of change, when we are impoverished by vicissitudes or called to part with those whom we love, we cannot trust God and his wise kind ordering of our life, we may well doubt whether what we thought our "faith" in brighter times was more than self-confidence and a happy content with happy circumstances. It is the night and the tempest which try our faith, which tell us whether or not we have a real faith. And hence it is that those who have passed through deep spiritual experiences, who have known many losses and griefs, if they have improved them, are distinguished by a settled calm which no shock of change disturbs, and at which we of little faith, or unready faith, can only wonder and admire. The ties which bind them to this visible and temporal world have been detached one by one; the ties which bind them to the world unseen and eternal have been multiplied and strengthened. Future changes can only detach the few weak links which still bind them to earth; the treasures they may yet lose will be laid up for them in heaven; their heart is where their treasure is; they walk by faith; their affections are above; their life is hid with Christ in God.

When the Lord Jesus had rebuked his disciples, He rebuked the winds and the waves: when He had calmed his

friends, He calmed the tempest.* He speaks to the unruly elements as to sentient intelligent creatures. He speaks to them with an imperial authority which proves Him to be the Eternal Word by whom all things were created and made. We a little lose, perhaps, the dignity and power of his command to the wind and the sea by our translation. In the Greek, each of his commands is given by a single verb in the imperative mood. To the winds He said "Σιώπα," "Be at peace," and to the waves "Πεφίμωσο," "Be still." And there is a simple divine dignity in the words which irresistibly reminds us of the creative command, *Yehiōth*, "Let there be light," or the healing command *Ephphatha*, "Be opened." His large style betrays Him. It is the Lord of Nature who speaks. He speaks as one who knows that his commandment runs very swiftly, with the natural ease of one who knows that He has only to speak, and it will be done, only to command, and it will stand fast.

It is because He is the Lord of Nature as well as the Friend of man, that we ought to trust Him, to put an entire and hearty faith in Him, and to keep our faith always at hand. And surely our study of this Scripture should increase and confirm our faith in Him. For it sets Him before us not only as the Lord of Nature, but as the Lord of its convulsions and storms, as holding even these in his hands. We are the slaves of custom, the fools of sense. When the world around us is quiet and all things move in their accustomed course ; while the sky is bright, and the winds are low and soft, and the sea ripples with a fresh tender music before the prow, we can trust the Lord, or

* Mark and Luke indeed narrate the rebuke of the wind and the sea before the rebuke of the disciples ; but they do not profess to stand on the order of the two events, or give us any note of time and succession. Only Matthew does that (viii. 26), "He saith unto them, Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm."

flatter ourselves that we trust Him. But let the earth quake, or the thunder roll, or the swift jagged flash stab the clouds; let the heavens gather blackness, and the winds rave, and the waves rise and beat upon the boat, and we tremble as though the Lord had ceased to reign. "Faith sees Him always near;" where then is *their* faith from whom even a thunderstorm or the lurid shadows of eclipse can hide Him? Where is *their* faith who doubt whether they shall know peace again, or give up all for lost, so soon as any grave trouble or deprivation, any sickness or bereavement, befalls them? Let such "fearful souls fresh courage take." Christ is Lord of Nature even in its wildest moods. At night, when the tempest lowers, and the boat fills, and wave beats down on wave, He has but to speak, and the winds are hushed, the waves stilled, and there is a great calm. And if He does not speak to *them*, He never fails to speak to *us*, and to speak peace to us, by the very war and strife of the elements around us. When the storm was over, the disciples said, "What manner of man is this who commands the winds and the water, and they obey Him?" And that was what the storm came for, and was hushed for, to set them thinking of Him, to give them truer thoughts of the Peasant Rabbi whom they loved but did not understand, to teach them that He was Lord of all, to win them to a deeper trust in Him. That, too, is what our disasters and our happy fortunes come for, our tempests and our calms, our perils and our deliverances. They come to set us thinking of Him whom, in the quiet every-day course of our life, we are too apt to forget. They come to teach us that He is always with us, ordering all things according to the good pleasure of his will; and to constrain us to trust in Him instead of in ourselves, by making us feel how utterly we are in his hands. Sudden losses, sudden partings, sudden dangers, overtake us; we never continue

in one stay: our life swings sharply from vicissitude to vicissitude, or heavily from grief to grief. For a little while we are at peace; God's lamp shines over our heads, and we walk happily by its light: but in a moment the shadows darken round us, and the lamp goes out, and we grope after God and cannot find Him. At an hour of which we were not aware, without any omen or warning to prepare us, that for which we looked not falls upon us—perhaps one of the very last things we expected or had reason to expect. The child, a miracle of health and beauty a moment since, lies cold at our feet; the friend we most loved and trusted fails in the very qualities for which we would have backed him against the world; the staff on which we most relied fails us; the prosperity which seemed as though it could never be moved passes away in an instant. "Many such things as these doeth God with man." And when we ask, What is the meaning of it all? the answer comes—"In the day of prosperity and in the day of adversity remember that God sends both this and that, in order that men should not be able to foresee that which is to come, and should trust in Him who is able to foresee it." The surprises which befall us teach us how terribly uncertain our life is, and all that we hold dear in life; they teach us how ignorant we are, how impotent, how utterly in larger wiser hands than our own. And if we are men indeed, and have discourse of reason, we learn at last that our only hope of peace lies in faith—in knowing and trusting Him who rules this world and all worlds, who sets all our times upon the score. This is the moral of change, this the function of the tempests which swoop down upon us as we sail tranquilly on tranquil waters, and before whose fierce breath we flee, beaten of huge waves and strong.

Danger is not dangerous, nor death dreadful, if Christ be with us and we have faith in Him. We may go down in

the storm, or we may ride through storm into calm : but in either case He saves us, and we can never perish ; for he that believeth on Him hath eternal life, the life over which time and the changes of time have no power. "With Christ in the vessel we" may "smile at the storm : " but do we ? All the sorrowful changes of life are ours, and minister to our good, if we are his, even to the last change of all : but it is hard for us to believe that life and death, things present and things to come, are ours, because we are Christ's, and Christ is God's, and all things are his. A true dependence on God makes us independent of all beside : fearing Him, we have nothing else to fear. Perhaps so many storms and surprises come upon us, in order that we may learn this lesson, and enter into the settled peace of faith. When they come, let us not despair, even though our faith be little or unready. Let us rather remember how tender and patient He was with the Twelve, how He delivered them because they trusted in Him, although their trust was neither pure nor strong. From his grace to them, let us learn that even an imperfect, selfish, upbraiding faith, so that it appeal to Him, may weather the storm, and come to know Him better through danger, and deliverance, and rebuke.

Christ was asleep in the boat, but He was neither disabled nor indifferent. Had the disciples but trusted in Him, and baled out the water that filled the boat, and run before the storm, and sent their most skilful pilot to the helm, all would have been well with them : they would not have needed so much as to awake Him out of his sleep. But this test was too hard for men of a weak and unapt faith. And it is often too much for us. When our trial comes, Christ often seems remote from us or indifferent to our need and peril, lapped in dreams in which we have no part : and we grow frantic with baseless apprehensions, and cry out on Him, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish ?"

Ah, and how patient He is with us ! how meek and kind under our upbraiding ! Our faith has failed us, and by our very failures He sets us thinking—thinking how weak we are, how good and great He is. And then, when we know Him better, He repeats the trial. Again we are launched on the sea, while He stands on the mountains of eternity, and prays for us that our faith fail not. Again the night falls, and the sea works and becomes tempestuous. But He comes with the storm, walking the waves on which we are tossed ; and if at first we mistake our friend for a foe, and the Spirit of all grace for a pale menacing ghost, we know Him as soon as He speaks to us, and gladly receive Him into the ship. We are at peace because He is with us ; and no sooner is there this peaceful trust within, than there comes a great calm on all without, and we find ourselves where we would be. O how unsearchable are his riches, and his grace past finding out !

Finally, the parable which illustrates our personal life also illustrates our collective life and destiny. The Church is a boat, a sacred ark, tossed to and fro on the heaving waters of Time, beaten from its course by many storms, swept by many waves, often all but wrecked, not so much by the rocks and shoals of time as by the mutinies and contentions, the factiousness, the carelessness, the groundless panics of its crew. The Church has often been, and still oftener has been thought to be, in danger : yet it is in no real danger while Christ is in it and the crew have even a little faith in Him. Only, there must be peace in the Church before there can be peace in the world. Not till our emulous contentions for pre-eminence, our selfish wranglings over “the goods” the Church carries as ballast in her hold, our hard judgments and quick resentments, have come to an end, will the Church ride prosperously on her course to the desired haven.

XXIII.

Accidents not Judgments.*

LUKE XIII. 1-5.

“**A**N old Maiden Gentlewoman,” says Addison, in one of his inimitable *Spectators*, “whom I shall conceal under the name of NEMESIS, is the greatest Discoverer of Judgments that I have met with. She can tell you what Sin it was that set such a Man’s House on fire, or blew down his Barns. . . She has a Crime for every Misfortune that can befall any of her Acquaintance; and when she hears of a Robbery that has been made, or a Murder that has been committed, enlarges more on the Guilt of the Suffering Person than on that of the Thief or the Assassin. In short, she is so good a Christian that whatever happens to herself is a Trial, and whatever happens to her Neighbours is a Judgment.”

NEMESIS, a maiden in Addison’s time, must long since have married—married and brought forth many children. Her descendants are to be met in almost every street. Their name is Legion; their pedigree, at least on the spindle-side, incontestable. Their hereditary characteristics—that keen scent for other folks’ sins, which yet is strangely at fault when their own sins are in chase; their perfect acquaintance with all the secrets of human guilt, combined with an equally perfect exemption from its stains; their

* Written in May, 1865.

prompt pitiless indignation against those who suffer wrong, rather than against those who do wrong;—all these, with many more, are patent to the most casual observer. Who has not encountered these worthy children of an unworthy mother? They “peep and mutter” in every neighbourhood. Perambulatory oracular shrines, they walk in all circles, and shrill their acidulous “woes” and “burdens” into every ear. They are up to all defections, whether of the right hand or the left. Milestones and mysteries, impervious to other eyes, are transparent to theirs, if, at least, any evil secret be lurking in them. They are familiar with all bosom sins—except their own. For them every room in the house has a cupboard, and every cupboard a skeleton; and they can tell you whose it is and how it got there. No sparrow falls to the ground but they can tell you of which wing he is lamed, and what he has done to deserve it. No carcase falls in any desert, however solitary and remote, but these vultures—who have no nose save for carrion—are gathered together to eat and eke to decry. No traveller falls among thieves but that, instead of helping or even passing him by, they stand beside him speculating on his guilt, pouring not oil and wine but the venom of their rebukes, into his wounds; and then, mounting their ass, they ride off, with the port of men who have done a good deed that day, to make merry at their inn.

What they see or suspect, that they publish abroad. What is done in the darkness, that they bring to the light—not that it may thereby be reprovèd, but that they may plume themselves on their superior piety. What is done in the chamber, that they proclaim from the house-top, their house-top version being for the most part hopelessly, if not wilfully, corrupt. They thrive on other men’s decay, grow strong on their infirmities, wax holy on their sins. They pull out the plums from their neighbours’ characters,

and cry, "What good men are we!" If all save themselves are so bad, are not they the more manifest saints? Other men's vices are the dung out of which these fair flowers grow, the dross from which these precious ores are extracted, the darkness in which these cheap candles shine. Prophets without inspiration, priests whose Urim and Thummim are their own narrow prejudices and preconceptions, they pronounce "dooms," or give an interpretation of them, which no sane mortal can believe, which the whole sane world can greet only with inextinguishable laughter: as when an Austrian high-priest assured the Italians that "Liberalism is a great sin, for which Heaven punishes mankind with the Vine Disease;" or a Scotch Presbyterian, who habitually dons the prophetic mantle or some ragged imitation of it, traces "the Potato Blight" to "the Maynooth Grant!"

In ridiculing and denouncing the temerity of these "great Discoverers of Judgments" who "deal damnation round the land," we are by no means fighting with what Carlyle calls "*defunct* devils," or slaying sins that have been thrice slain. They live, and, to the shame of Christian charity, are likely to live, long after we have drawn our last breath. On how many occasions in the public history of the last few years have we seen these "fools" of their own conceit "rush in where angels fear to tread!"

It is not very long since the heart of the nation was shaken by the tidings that Albert the Good was suddenly taken to his rest. There was silence for a little space, the whole people being stricken dumb with the greatness and suddenness of the calamity. One of the earliest voices that broke the silence was that of the ablest bishop on the Bench,* who comforted us in that time of our distress with the pious consolatory remark, that the death of the Good

* The Bishop of Oxford.

Prince was "God's judgment on our national infidelity." And when Count Cavour, the most sagacious and loyal statesman of modern times, fell beneath his great burden of care, did not The O'Donoghue, amid the general grief, exult over a patriot the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose, and bid the House of Commons mark "the finger of God" pointing in wrath to that honoured grave?

It is not four years since the darkness of the Claydon Tunnel, on the Brighton Railway, grew suddenly horrid with groans, and shrieks, and mortal outcries, amid which many poor souls sank into the deeper darkness of death. Forthwith the "great Discoverers of Judgments" made broad their phylacteries, and waxed prophetic on the calamity which had wounded so many tender hearts. Was it not *on a Sunday* that these poor souls were carried hence? Manifestly, those who were maimed and crushed in the collision were sinners above all the men of London and Brighton, and the special sin for which this sore judgment came upon them was that of breaking the Hebrew law of the Sabbath! The case was as clear as that of the Man in the Moon, who, as all men know, was caught up to the icy lunar bosom for picking up sticks on a Sunday! And yet only a few weeks before, *and on a Sunday*, there occurred that memorable panic in Surrey Hall, in which almost as many victims were maimed and crushed while the Preacher's voice was still sounding in their ears! And if these, whose frames were mangled while they were offering the sacrifices of worship, were not guilty above all men; might it not be that the unworshipping excursionists crushed by the collision had done nothing worthy of death? Within a fortnight, moreover, and this time *on a Monday*, there was another accident to an excursion train.* Again groans,

* The accident on the North London line.

and shrieks, and mortal outcries wounded the general ear; and by the light of burning carriages the maimed and dead were extricated from the complex fatal heap. And if an accident on the first day of the week is a judgment on Sunday travelling; was the accident on the second day of the week a judgment on *Monday* travelling? If every day on which a great catastrophe has occurred is to be made a *dies non*, or a *dies nefasti*, on what day of the week *will* it be lawful to travel?

It is not likely that any of us have forgotten the Cotton Famine; the dark cloud still hangs in the northern heaven, though now many stars of hope shine through it. When it was at its worst, when beneath that dismal threatening shadow there sat thousands on thousands of patient men, clemmed yet unmurmuring, men of whom all England thought with a sacred ruth and pride, a wealthy dignitary* of the wealthiest church in Christendom wrote them—not a cheque, but a pastoral letter. Alas! this high dignified priest is a great Discoverer of Judgments. He can tell you what sin it was that blew down this man's barn, or set that man's house on fire, as deftly as any old woman who ever squatted on the tripod. By way of comforting the starving "hands," he sent them the assurance that the cotton famine was God's judgment on them for "spending money in tobacco and intoxicating drink!" Now, to think of the smug Dean thrusting his shovel-hat into the innermost and best-informed circles of heaven, and then bustling down to earth to explain, on the best authority, what THE ALMIGHTY is doing or about to do; to think of him as calling down lightning from heaven to break—a glass and a pipe, may well move the most unwonted midriff to laughter. But to think that an authorized expositor of divine truth, a shepherd of souls, should go among the thousands who sat

* The Dean of Carlisle.

sorrowful, and starving, and stunned, with a scourge instead of a crook, and offer them an insult instead of a consolation; to think of the many who, accepting such expositors as true interpreters of the Divine Word, must have turned away from the waters of life fouled by those unbeautiful feet;—is it not well-nigh enough to drive even a patient man to bawling, or at the best to a prayer that *their* mouths may be stopped who so wickedly misrepresent the mercy of God?

The Civil War in America still drags its slow weary length along. “A manifest judgment on slavery!” cry the Northern Abolitionists. “No,” replies the South; “it is as clear an assertion of liberty as history knows.” “You are both wrong,” say the Mormons; “it is a judgment on you both for murdering our prophet, and expelling us from Utah.” “Nay,” reply certain English quidnuncs, “*you* are as much in the wrong as the rest. Some eighty years ago the States wickedly rebelled against a good king and a light taxation, and now they are justly given up to the tyranny of military despots, and crushed beneath an overwhelming burden of debt.”

Now these are all instances in which public events occurring within the last five years have been interpreted, and misinterpreted, by those who affect to be in the secrets of God. It is impossible to glance over them without remarking, first, that just as slugs, and snails, and toads come out after rainstorms, so these false prophets swarm after any great calamity, their croak being loudest and hoarsest when men sit silent with dismay: secondly, that they each interpret the Divine Providence according to their private prejudices and pocket theories, and, therefore, contradict each other in the absurdest fashion—croak clashing with croak: and, thirdly, that they carefully exclude *themselves* from the operation of the vengeance, being “such *very* good Chris-

tians, that whatever happens to them is a trial, while whatever happens to their neighbours is a judgment."

But perhaps nothing is more remarkable in these Discoverers of Judgments than the impudent tact with which they select the facts which make for their theory, and ignore the facts which tell against it. If an excursion train meet with an accident on the first day of the week, it is a clear judgment on Sunday travelling, although, for a very obvious reason, there are more accidents on every other day of the week than on this; and the logical inference—if "judgments" were our sole criteria—would be, that of all days of the week Sunday was the best and safest for taking a journey. If one rogue or hypocrite is detected, unmasked, punished, this again, we are told, is a judgment of God: but if any ask, "Is not the impunity of hundreds of rogues and hypocrites also a judgment?" we receive no reply, or a reply which carries more commination in it than logic. In short, these men have the valuable faculty which Carlyle ironically lauds—"the talent of taking up simply what they can carry, and ignoring all the rest; leaving all the rest as if it were not there." You have only to compel them to take up and carry *all* the facts, and they break down. The happiest illustration of this point is a story so good that, if it is not true, it ought to be true. When Milton—old, poor, blind, worn out with many labours—had retired to obscurity, Charles II. paid him a visit at his house in Bunhill Fields, and found the statesman of the Commonwealth, the poet of all time, sitting at his door basking in the sun. "Do you not see, Mr. Milton," said the crowned *roué* whom the degenerate Church styled Our Most Religious King, "that your blindness is a judgment of God for the part you took against my father, King Charles?" "Nay," replied Milton; "if I have lost my *sight* through God's judgment, what can you say of your father, who lost his *head*?" One should

hope that Our Most Religious never tried *his* hand again at interpreting the ways of God to man.

We are far enough—as need hardly be said—from denying the doctrine of a Divine Providence, or that it really interferes in every even the most minute concern of life. With Cowper we say—

Happy the man who sees a God employed
In all the good and ill that chequer life :

or, with Wordsworth, Happy the man who rests in

An assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power.

What we do deny is, that these Discoverers of Judgments are in the secrets of THE ALMIGHTY. To affirm that by an invariable and most merciful law sin entails punishment—national sins national punishments, personal sins personal punishments—is the duty of every Christian teacher : but to fix the times and assort punishments to sins, to affect to stand midway between heaven and earth and interpret the mysteries of Providence, is simply stark presumption in any uninspired man. It is not given to the sons of men, even though they be priests and bishops, to comprehend the goings of the Inhabitant of Eternity. The sweep of eternity is large, and gives scope and verge for the play of retribution beyond the reach of mortal eye. To play the interpreter, and say, “This punishment is a judgment on that sin,” is to play the fool.

Even heathen sagacity discerned that the NEMESIS which waits on men's sins was no swift-footed Camilla scouring the plains of life, but an awful yet merciful goddess, daughter of Night and Darkness, who weighs, and ponders, and threatens with her brandished thongs, before she smites. And the

thought personified in the Greek *mythus* is confirmed by the Christian revelation. The Holy Scriptures affirm the mystery and delay of retribution; that it is not measured on mortal scales; that the sweep and fall of its scourge are not traceable by mortal eyes. They teach us that those "whose feet are *swift* to shed blood" often outrun the pursuing vengeance for a time, and for a long time, nay, beyond all bounds of time. They teach that many offences 'scape whipping here, though sooner or later the impartial lash falls on all. In Psalm and Parable they tell us that the wicked are not plagued as other men: they ruffle in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; while humble virtue, clothed in rags, munches its scanty eleemosynary crust, and has only a dog—and even *that* not its own—for physician, and comforter, and friend.

The Gospel teaches us a more excellent way of interpreting the facts of life than that of these presumptuous Discoverers of Judgments. Instead of harping on the bloody fate of the men of distant Galilee, it bids us look nearer home to "the eighteen" here in Jerusalem on whom the tower fell and crushed them. Instead of dwelling even on the mysterious fate of our close neighbours, it bids us come *quite* home, and repent, lest we ourselves should likewise perish. It teaches us, in effect, that no evil is so evil as the spurious goodness which, separating us from our fellows, cries to its neighbours as from a superior platform, "Stand down there, for I am holier than you." It teaches us that the accidents by which we suffer, so far from being personal judgments on personal sins, are parts of that great mystery of evil, which is now suffered to task our thoughts and try our faith, in order that it may by-and-by lead in a completer beatitude, a profounder rest, an eternal good and joy.

The only safe moral we can draw from the judgments of God, or what seem to us his judgments, is **the** warning,

‘*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*’ And this is a warning which comes down to us reinforced by its fulfilment in the history of those to whom it was first given. The Jews did not “repent;” they did “*likewise* perish.” Just as “the eighteen” were crushed by the falling tower, so the desperate remnant of the holy nation were crushed, in the final assault of the Romans on their beautiful city, beneath the falling forts and walls. Just as by Pilate’s perfidy the blood of the Galileans was mingled with that of their sacrifices, so the surviving Jews, driven from the walls into the Temple, fell beneath the Roman sword, and were slain as, for the last time, they bent to worship in the sacred precinct.

Let us take the warning, and not judge one another any more. We are too apt, when we see any forlorn and solitary brother sitting, like Job, among the potsherds, to sit down beside him, like Job’s comforters, and hand him the very sharpest and roughest of the sherds that he may scrape himself withal. We are too apt, when any calamity befalls our neighbours, to assume that they must be sinners above all other men, and to speculate—sometimes in their hearing—on the crimson and scarlet dyes of their guilt. We need, therefore, to remember that accidents are not judgments, that accidents are not even *accidents*, since they are all ordered of God, and form part of that gracious discipline by which He lifts us through the graduated and rising circles of his service. They are sent for *our* sakes, who only stand and witness them, as well as for the sake of those who suffer them; not that we may judge others, but that we may examine ourselves. They are sent that we, if we suffer by them, may reach out hands of faith through time,

To catch
The far-off interest of tears,
And find in loss a gain to match.

XXIV.

Malchus.

MATTHEW XXVI. 51—56 ; MARK XIV. 47—49 ; LUKE XXII. 49—53 ;
and JOHN XVIII. 10, 11.

THE healing of Malchus forms a striking episode in the story of our Lord's arrest. All the Evangelists narrate it, each contributing some stroke or touch which serves to complete the picture. If, that we may have the incident before us in all its details, we collate the Gospels, fusing the four narratives into one, the story runs thus. "Then came they" (*i.e.*, the band of officers and men which the Sanhedrin had placed at the disposal of the traitor Judas, and the multitude armed with swords and staves which accompanied the Roman guard), "and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. When they who were with Him saw what would follow, they said unto Him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them, Simon Peter, having a sword" (there were only *two* swords for the whole company of the Apostles, but, of course, *Peter* would insist on carrying one of them), "drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto him" (Peter), "Put up thy sword into its place ; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot even now pray to my Father, and He shall instantly give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be

fulfilled, that thus it must be? The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? And Jesus answered and said " (to the band), "Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear" (the ear of Malchus), "and healed him."

1. All the Evangelists narrate the wounding, but only Luke, *the physician*, records the healing of the wound inflicted on Malchus. To him the healing would have a special, a professional interest. He would not be content to tell us that the ear was cut off without also telling us how, at the tender divine touch of the Great Physician, the gaping wound was healed and the severed ear replaced. Here is a touch of nature beyond the reach of conscious art. If one of the Evangelists were a physician, he would be sure to mark and narrate the cure, though the others might pass it by. That he does mark and record it is one of those slight incidental evidences* which lend a stronger support to the Christian documents than the large patent proofs which might be the work of design. And it is well for us, it is a theme for thankful praise, that the Divine Spirit moved men of divers character and position to tell in their several ways the single story of his love—the learned physician, Luke, no less than Matthew, the contemned Publican; Paul, the accomplished scholar, no less than fisherman Peter.

2. Of course it was *Peter* who struck the blow. No doubt he struck with all his strength, meaning to cleave a skull, though he only cut off an ear. Probably Malchus caught the gleam of the descending steel, and by a swift instinctive motion evaded the full force of the stroke. The other Apostles, when the multitude lay rude violent hands

* Another of these undesigned evidences or coincidences is implied in the fact that of the four Evangelists only John gives *the name* of the high priest's servant. John was personally acquainted with Caiaphas, as we learn from his Gospel (chap. xviii. 15), and therefore might well be so familiar with the leading members of his household as to be able to name them.

on the sacred person of the Lord, are content to ask, "Lord, *shall* we smite with the sword?" But while they ask, Peter acts. With characteristic precipitation he strikes wildly and furiously at the furious crowd. The lesson of patient dignity which the life of Jesus had taught, and which had received its crowning illustration in the Vigil of the Garden, is forgotten for the moment; the fervent and vehement passion native to the man flashes out, and the sad holy calm of the hour is broken with a brawl. Yet wrong as Peter was—wrong in haste, wrong in malice—probably we love him all the better for that hasty blow. There is that in us which sympathizes with the ardent passion that could not stay to reason and to calculate consequences—with the instinct, the *storgé*, which flies blindly and wildly to protect its beloved, even though it be against a world in arms. There is that in us which sympathizes with the gallant knight who listened with streaming eyes to the story of Divine love; but who, when the priest went on to narrate the indignities cast on Christ—the midnight arrest, the mockings and scourgings, the rude insults of the rude soldiery—broke out into a great oath and cried, "Would God that I had been there, to strike but one good blow for Him!" Let us hope that there is also that in us which is in sympathy with the meekness of Him who went as a lamb to the slaughter, who does not need the poor defence that we can give, who will not accept our hatred of any brother, however sinful, as love or service done to Him; for it is harder—harder, and therefore braver and higher—to endure and be still, than to shout and wrestle and strike. If we feel that we too could have struck with Peter, let us ask whether we could have been gentle and patient with Christ. *That* is the true greatness; till we reach that, we shall not be perfect. Many a man is "swift to wrath," and thinks it brave and noble to resent personal

wrong instantly, strongly, who is not brave enough to master himself, nor noble enough to suppress his wrath. The true hero, the true conqueror, is he who can return good for evil, and a blessing for a curse.

Yet, that we may not altogether despair of ourselves because we are in much alien from the spirit of Christ, let us remember that He finds room in his kingdom for all sorts and conditions of men ; for forward fiery Peter as well as for those who will not act until He give the signal for action ; and approve their deed. Peter finds a place in the Master's service no less than busy sagacious Andrew, or slow doubting Thomas, or those other Apostles who were of so quiet and unassuming a spirit that we know little of them but their names. Nay, Iscariot himself shall have a place so long as he cares to fill it, and share with the rest in the wisdom and grace of the Master. However faulty we may be, however dull and slow of heart, however impatient and precipitate, Christ will teach us, and find us a work to do that will chastise and correct our faults. He will bestow on us a teaching and discipline that will gradually conform us to his perfect image, while it conserves and purifies whatever characteristic energy or virtue there may be in us.

3. It is Peter who strikes the blow ; it is *Malchus* who is struck. And Malchus is not a soldier of the Roman guard, nor even a bailiff or apparitor in the pay of the Sanhedrin ; he is the personal servant (*δοῦλος*) of Caiaphas the priest. We may be sure that Peter struck at one of those who were foremost in laying violent hands on Christ, foremost in the attempt to handcuff or pinion Him. And therefore we may be sure that Malchus was more eager to arrest Him than either the bailiff or the guard. "Like master, like man : " and Malchus seems to have been only a Caiaphas of a meaner sort ; to have indulged a priestly rancour which *he* could not veil under subtle glosses, and

which in him knew none of the restraints of culture or of high dignified position. It was all very well for Caiaphas to argue in the Council that it was "better for one man to die than that the whole nation should perish." It was all very well for him to hide ugly murder under a fair cloak of policy, to sit in state and question Jesus in courteous phrase about "his disciples and his doctrine;" and, then, formally to remit Him to the secular arm for the due punishment of his heresy and treason. But the *caitiff* Caiaphas—Malchus, the high priest's servant, does not care to disguise his hatred. *He* has no subtle politic suggestion to offer, nor can he break polished Sadducean jests over an enemy and an enthusiast. He expresses the priestly rancour as his nature prompts, in curses and blows. Therefore he is among the first to lay rough hands on Christ; he is forward to bind and lead away the Rabbi whom his master hated, although there were guards and apparitors enough for all that, had he cared to leave it to them.

Malchus has learned this hatred of Christ from Caiaphas:—must not Caiaphas answer for the sin of Malchus? Ah, how dreadful is the responsibility which for the most part we very lightly bear, our responsibility for the influence we exercise on children, or servants, or dependents! No man liveth unto himself. Our loves and hatreds are espoused, our conduct is imitated, our opinions and actions are pleaded as a warrant or an excuse. At many a moment when we think not of it, nor mean it, we distil our venom or our virtue, our enmity or our charity, into the hearts of those who are about us, confirming them in their antipathy to God and to their neighbour, or helping them to love God and man. We shall all meet some Malchus at the bar of judgment for whom we shall have in large measure to answer—a wife, a child, a friend, a servant, on whom our example was fruitful in influences, good or bad. Let us see

to it that he be not able to lay his neglects of duty, or his aversion to truth and goodness, to our charge. If we cannot answer for our own sins, how are we to answer for his?

To encourage us in our endeavour to do men good and make them better, let us note that even for this misguided wicked Malchus the Lord has mercy. It is for him that a miracle of healing is wrought. Christ uses the power He would not use on his own behalf for one who is eager to insult and injure Him; for one who, in laying his rude hands on the Rabbi of Nazareth, is performing no military or legal function, no duteous service, but is rather coming between the guard and their duty in order to gratify the rancour he has caught from the priests. It is one of the basest of men, in one of his basest moods, whom Christ touches and heals. And if Malchus was not beyond the reach of his compassion, who is? In Him there is help, health, healing, salvation for the vilest. Even in their vilest moods they are not beyond the scope of his mercy. He can give "a hearing ear" even to the disobedient and the unthankful, even to those who, through disobedience, have lost the very faculty of hearing. We may all come to Him for grace, if in no nobler company, than with Malchus and his crew: and, so that we find grace, it will not greatly matter with whom we come.

4. There is in Christ that which answers to all needs. If He has healing for Malchus, He also has healing rebuke for Peter. The wound inflicted by the sword must be cured; but also the sword must be taught to know its place. *Simon* Peter—the old name Simon is given him to indicate that he has once more acted according to his old unregenerate nature—is warned: "Put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." This rebuke has been interpreted variously, in opposite senses even. Some read it: "Put up

thy sword, but do not cast it away. Reserve it for its right moment and use. *The Church may strike*, though it must not strike needlessly and at random." Others read it: "The sheath is the only proper place for the Christian sword. It must never be drawn. *No man may strike.*" But, various and contradictory as the interpretations of this passage are, its real meaning is surely obvious enough to those who care to find it. That it is wrong to use force in the service of truth; that the progress of a spiritual enterprise cannot be advanced by carnal weapons; that it is alien to the spirit of Christ to persecute and injure men in the name of religion, or to seek to make them religious by placing them at any civil or social disadvantage so long as they are, or are thought to be, sceptical or schismatical,—this, surely, no candid man can well doubt who believes that the kingdom of Christ is not of this world. *He* carried no sword, nor should the Church. If the Master used no force, should his servants use it? If He rebuked Peter for using it, are we—are even Peter's successors—at liberty to use it? You cannot make a man believe against his will, though you may induce him to add hypocrisy to unbelief by *saying* that he believes. You will not change any one of his convictions by cleaving his skull; and of all ways of touching his heart the most unlikely is that of thrusting him through with a sword. You cannot make a man a good hearer of the Word by cutting off his ears, nor will you win him to a good confession by smiting him on the lips. Whatever else the rebuke of Peter may mean, we may be quite sure it means this: that we cannot serve God by harming men, that we cannot bring them to a better mind by force and violence.

But it means much more than this. Our Lord is here laying down a law of his kingdom. As his custom was, He generalizes his thought; He rises from the particular to the

universal. One man, Peter, had taken the sword against one, Malchus. And in rebuking Peter, the Lord Jesus gives a rule which holds good of all men. The rule is no new rule, but an old rule which we have had from the beginning. It is not peculiar to Christ. We find it in the first book of Scripture, and in the last. In Genesis* we read, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." In the Apocalypse† we read, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword." Our Lord's words, "All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword," are simply an echo of the words of Moses, and find an echo in the words of John. And all three—Moses, the Lord Jesus, and John—lay down one section of the law of Divine retaliation; the law which attaches to every deed its due recompense of reward, the law in virtue of which we sow as we reap, and eat as we bake. Violence provokes violence, always has provoked it, always will. Draw your sword on the world, and the world will draw its sword on you.

Violence provokes violence, justice must be done in the end, "with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again,"—this is the general principle involved in our Lord's rebuke of Peter. Do any object to it?—"It is not an universal principle; it does not always hold good. Many soldiers have died in their beds, and some brigands and murderers." We reply: These broad proverbial sayings are not to be taken in the letter, but in their spirit. Out of Scripture we do not think of translating proverbs literally. If we say, "No path without a puddle," no man supposes us to mean that no road was ever found without a hole full of dirty water in it: we are at once understood as meaning that no way of life, however fair and prosperous, is without its drawbacks and difficulties, its slippery and dirty places.

* Gen. ix. 6

† Rev. xiii. 10.

In like manner, when our Lord affirms, "All that take the sword perish by the sword," we are not to think only, or mainly, of swords of steel. We are to understand Him as meaning that all violence is fatal. It not only provokes violence in return, but it also exhausts the vital energies. If nothing else avails to keep men from indulging fierce and savage moods, *this* might well restrain them, that such an indulgence weakens them and hastens their end. Let a man habitually fight, and he is sure to be worsted some day. Let a man habitually indulge a furious and violent temper, raving and striking at every provocation, and he will not live out half his days. He will consume them at double speed. He takes the sword, and he dies by the sword he takes.

But though we are to interpret these words of the Lord in a large spiritual, rather than in a literal, sense, they suggest a very definite practical question, and help us to answer it. "Is all use of the sword forbidden by the law of Christ? Is the magistrate never to use it, although he is to bear it? Is war in every case wrong and wicked?" Surely not. For our Lord is not speaking of those who *bear* the sword, not of those into whose hands it is *given* by the powers that be, and therefore by the ordinance of God, but of those who *take* the sword, who, as the Greek word implies, *seize* upon it, at the instigation of private motives, to avenge personal wrong. The magistrate does not seize upon the sword, nor use it for selfish ends. It is given him by God, and given both that he may execute justice on evil-doers and defend the nation against foreign foes. He is especially commanded not "to bear the sword *in vain*," *i.e.*, to use it when its use becomes necessary in order that he may be an effective terror to them that do evil, whether the evil-doers be native or alien. True, war is an evil. True, violence provokes violence and hastens death. But there are even worse evils than war, evils so malignant and irre-

parable that, compared with these, death is a refuge and a friend. Whatever renders a free, pure, noble, Christian life impossible is more to be feared than even war or death. To seize the sword is to die by the sword; but to die by the sword in defence of virtue or freedom, hearth and altar, is better than to drag out an ignominious life. It is simply to refer our cause to God, and to give ourselves back, at what we hold to be his call, into his wise gracious hands—the hands which rule the world into which we go no less than the world we leave.

5. But, O, how foolish and extravagant of Peter to think that his single and unskilful sword was required for the defence of Christ! With what a royal magnificence of speech does Christ put his silly conceit to the blush! A Roman legion was the grandest and most splendid sight, the most terrible and invincible instrument known to Peter. It consisted of at least six thousand picked men who moved as one, and before whose levelled spears and constant undaunted valour all the armies of the world had broken into flight. And the Lord Jesus bids Peter remember that, at a word of his, He and the Apostles would find themselves each the centre of a “legion of angels,” surrounded by century on century of immortals clad in the intolerable splendours of a celestial panoply, before the sweep of whose strong wings, or the mere rustling of whose spears, all the chivalry of earth might flee unabashed. What magnificence there is in the thought! and what grace! For, observe, the Lord Jesus does not so much as conceive of any glory for Himself in which the Eleven are not to share. If one legion come, “*twelve* legions of angels” must come, one for each of them, as well as one for Himself!

No man *took* the life of Jesus from Him, or could take it. He lay it down of Himself. What could that craven “multitude,” who had come out against the gentle unarmed

Teacher with swords and staves, as against a robber chief-tain like Barabbas, and whose leaders were even now binding his hands and forcing him away—what could these have done, or Caiaphas, or Pilate, or Rome itself, against the Master of so many invincible legions? He is conscious of his might, but He will not use it; the grand sense of power surges up into his brain for a moment, but He subdues it; He sees the angelic legions waiting, longing, for the command, but He will not utter it. He goes a willing victim to the cross, and voluntarily lays down his life for the world He loved so well, and which requited his love so ill. Yet He must have been sorely tempted to use his power. Suffering such as was now at hand was dreadful to Him, as it is to us. We catch the accents of a holy shame and indignation in his demand, “Be ye come out *as against a robber?*” But He does not yield to righteous anger. He will not use his power to escape the suffering He dreads.

Two reasons are assigned for his constancy. The first, that only by submitting to the violence and insults of the multitude could He fulfil the will of God. Ancient Scriptures had foretold that “thus it must be” with Him; and these Scriptures disclosed the will of the Father. It was enough. Let the Father’s will be done, though obedience to it meant shame and death. Thus He meets and conquers the temptation to a selfish use of power, as we may meet and conquer our temptations, “with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Then, secondly, He draws on past experience for present help. He asks, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” Only a few minutes since, He had passed through the agony and bloody sweat in the very garden in which He is now arrested. Even for Him it was hard—let us remember that, we who find it so hard—to accept the Father’s will, to yield Himself to death, to be made sin for us. The cup had seemed very bitter, even intolerable, to

Him. Thrice He had prayed that the cup might pass from Him; and the cup had not passed. It was even now being rudely thrust to his lips—God's cup, though it came to Him in man's hard insolent hands. But he had learned to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." It had cost Him an agony and passion to say that which we can never fathom, over which we can only brood in awe and contrition. But He had said it. He had meant what He said. And now He will not part with the blessing which had cost Him so dear; He will not waver from the resolve reached in the hour of prayer and spiritual agony. He recalls *that*, and profits by it. In this wild scene of angry confusion He will not revise the holy resolution at which He had arrived. He will drink the cup which his Father had sent Him, even though it is forced upon Him by these rude violent hands. And thus He has taught us, with a power beyond that of words, to profit by our spiritual conflicts, to become perfect through suffering, to recall in moments of temptation, when our hearts are heated and confused, the resolves formed in hours of prayerful stillness, that we may conquer in the strength which prayer has brought us.

6. When He had thus spoken, Jesus turned to the multitude who had come out against Him. There seems to have been some slight consternation and recoil in the eager crowd when Peter struck his blow, some fear that the other disciples might follow his lead. But so soon as they hear Jesus rebuke the rash ardent Apostle, they regain their courage, their insolence. They fling themselves afresh on the Master, and begin once more to pinion the hands that were never opened but to bless, and to force Him away. And the Lord Jesus, who had all power in heaven and earth, who might have called legions of angels to the rescue, stoops to ask a boon of his assailants. What does He ask? He asks for liberty—but only for liberty to do one of them

a service. With courteous accent and pleading significant gesture, He says to those who bind Him, "Suffer ye thus far. Permit me to lift my hand to yonder stricken ear, to heal that, and then do with me as you will." He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. He thinks of others, even of his enemies, before Himself: and, to do them good, will ask a favour He would not have asked for his own relief. When we were yet enemies, He loved us, and gave Himself for us. And if He loved us when we were enemies and far off from Him, may we not rely on his love if now we are reconciled and brought nigh? If on his way to the cross, with the world for his burden, He could tarry to heal one of the basest and wickedest of those who brought Him to the cross, may we not confidently expect his healing power now that He has passed through death into life, through shame into glory?

It is very touching to remember that his last miracle of healing was wrought for a man so vile and rancorous as Malchus, for the man who was leading Him to death. It is very touching to remember that the hands which had so often been lifted for the relief of human suffering were bound by one who himself had felt the virtue that went out of them; that the hands which had only been stretched out to heal and bless were now fettered, and their gracious ministry brought to a close by those whom they might still have served. But how animating, how full of comfort and hope, is the thought, that He has risen from the grave, to which they hurried Him, with new power to bless; that He has entered on a larger ministry of healing; that even the basest and most wicked of us may buy of Him, or beg if we cannot buy, healing balms for every wound, an infallible medicine for every disease that afflicts the soul! He who had mercy on Malchus, shall He have no mercy for us? If Malchus was not, can we be, beyond the scope of his grace?

XXV.

The Crown of Thorns.

ST. JOHN XIX. 2.

NOT in cruelty, perhaps, but only in mockery and scorn did the rough soldiers of the Roman Guard cast a purple robe on the bleeding shoulders of Christ, plat a crown for his head, put a reed in his hand, and feign to do Him homage as a king. All this was but a rude burlesque of the ceremonies with which they honoured the general whom they raised by acclamation to the throne, and was no doubt suggested by our Lord's claim to be the king of the Jews—a claim which to them must have seemed simply preposterous in the gentle unarmed peasant of Nazareth. To *us*, indeed, the last hours of any man, even the most debased and criminal, have a certain sanctity. Death gives him an interest and dignity wholly new. We treat him with respect, and should hold it simply brutal to embitter his dying moments with blows and insults. So much humanity at least we have all learned from Christ. But to the Roman legionaries such feelings were utterly unknown. To them it would seem a very proper jest that this soft-voiced Peasant—poor, unfriended, abandoned—should assert a claim against Cæsar. No reverence for death, no humane sympathy with a fellow-man about to be cast from the world, would restrain their full enjoyment of the jest; and probably it was in a rough good-humoured way, not with any studied malignity, but with broad laughter and mirth, many a word of loud

coarse merriment on their lips, that they placed the crown of thorns on that Sacred Head, and cringed and bowed in affected deference before it. But if they did not mean to be cruel, nevertheless they were cruel. It was *only* in insult and derision, not to inflict bodily pain, that they imposed the crown of thorns! Only! But to a gentle sensitive heart to be mocked in its agony is incalculably harder than to bear physical pain. Insults are sharper than thorns; derision is more cruel than a blow. The very excuse we make for the rough thoughtless soldiers simply renders the sufferings of their Victim more keen and profound.

Naturalists have spent much labour on determining the name of the plant from which the Guard broke the twigs they platted into a crown—no easy task, since at least a score of prickly shrubs were common in Palestine. Years ago, however, they named one plant, and that perhaps the most likely of all, *Zizyphus Spina Christi*, on the assumption that it was this which furnished the crown of thorns. Modern naturalists are pretty well agreed that it was this *zizyphus*, a low growing shrub which the Arabs call *Nabk*; it is as common in all the warmer parts of Syria as gorse is with us; the valley of the Jordan is absolutely overrun with it, and converted into an impenetrable thicket: and it was very suitable for the purpose, both because it has many sharp thorns, and because its flexible pliant branches may easily be twisted into a crown. In the deep green of its leaves, moreover, it closely resembles the ivy from which crowns were woven for imperators and victorious generals. A crown which looked like the imperial wreath, but which, instead of being cool and pleasant to the brow, inflicted a multitude of minute irritating pains,—this was the crown of thorns, the only crown which the world conferred on Him who came to save the world, and who gat Him the victory over death and sin.

Of this sacred relic Tradition babbles with even more than its usual folly. We are told that Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, guided by a vision, discovered the site of the holy sepulchre under a temple dedicated to Venus; and found in it, not only the Cross with its trilingual inscription, but also the crosses of the two thieves, the nails, the crown of thorns, and other relics to which men do homage to the present day. A superstitious fable this beyond all question; but there are historic facts connected with it which read us once more a lesson we often need to learn, viz., that so soon as we begin to hold the Christian faith in letter and form, instead of in spirit and life, we degrade toward ritualism, and will-worship, and spiritual death. For this crown of thorns discovered, or invented, to please the Empress Helena, was treasured for the adoration of the faithful in the great church at Constantinople. It descended as a precious heirloom from Emperor to Emperor till, in the thirteenth century, it came into possession of Baldwin II. Baldwin, being hard pressed by Turk and Tatar, first *pawned* the crown of thorns as security for a loan from the Venetians, and then *sold* it to Lewis, the King of France, for a sum amounting to about £54,000 of our money. A relic that has been pawned and sold must have lost much of its sanctity, one should think, and therefore we need follow the history of this crown no further. But I may mention that there are now several crowns of thorns in the possession of the Roman Church, each claiming to be the very wreath worn by Christ: and I have somewhere read a pretty legend of one of these crowns to the effect that, on every Easter Sunday, it breaks into flower, and fills the church with its sweet odours—a charming theme for a poem, had one a faculty that way.

We have now before us all that is known of the Crown of Thorns, and a great deal more than is *known* in any strict sense

of the word : we may therefore pass, from the fact that our Lord was thus crowned, to the spiritual suggestions of the fact.

1. And, first of all, let us mark how the wisdom of God penetrates and overrules the folly of man. The pagan soldiers meant only coarse derision when they platted a crown of thorns and put it on the head of Christ. But had they been a conclave of Hebrew sages bent on framing a sacred symbol which should speak heavenly truths to men through all ages, they could hardly have hit on a symbolism more instructive or more pathetic. For, according to the Hebrew Bible, thorns, as they are a consequence, so also they are an express type, of sin. Whether we read the story of our first parents as spiritual parable or as authentic history does not matter for our present purpose. In either case it affirms that thorns and briers sprang up to rebuke Adam's transgression. When he fell from his innocence, the gracious serviceable earth grew hard and stubborn. Instead of nourishing only trees and plants that were pleasant to the eye and good for food, it threw up a swarm of noxious briers whose thorns plagued men's hands and feet when they tilled the ground, and whose greedy roots sucked the soil's fertility from wholesome flowers and trees. There may be parable here ; nay, there is parable. For these painful thorns were an outward and visible sign of the inward disastrous change which had passed on men. They, too, had become barren of wholesome growths, fertile in all noxious growths. And these noxious growths of the soul were pregnant with pain and misery and death ; the sins men committed wounded and pierced them with many pangs. Hence all through the Bible thorns are used as symbols of sin, or of sinful men, or of the painful consequences in which sin issues. The heathen nations were to be as thorns

in the sides* and in the eyes† of Israel for their sins. The sons of Belial were as thorns to holy David.‡ Solomon speaks of thorns and snares in the way of the froward,§ meaning, of course, to warn them against the moral hindrances, temptations, pains, to which their frowardness would expose them. Ezekiel promises the captives of his day that, when they have repented and turned unto the Lord, there shall no more be a pricking brier among them, nor any grievous thorn;|| and Isaiah describes the peace and bounty of the regenerated earth in the familiar words, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and the myrtle instead of the brier."¶

Thus, throughout Scripture, the punitive and painful results of human sin, all the infirmities and languors and pangs it breeds in us, and all the miserable degradations it brings into our lot, are figuratively described as thorns sprung from the thorns which avenged the transgression of Adam, just as all our sins, in some sense, have their root in his sin. When, therefore, by the ordinance of God, no less than through the crime of man, a crown of thorns was placed on the head of Christ, we are simply tracing out a pervading symbolism of Scripture if we say: "In this crown of thorns we have an illustration of the truth, that Christ came to suffer for our sins, to carry our sicknesses, to become the second Adam, to undo the work of the first Adam, and to take away the sin of the entire race. As in the Adam all die, so in the Christ shall all be made alive."

Nay, more: it is hardly fanciful, it is still in accordance with the symbolism of Scripture if we mark how, while the thorns pierce our *feet and hands*, they pierced the very *head* of Christ; and find in this fact a hint that, while we all

* Numbers xxxiii. 55.

† 2 Samuel xxiii. 6.

|| Ezekiel xxviii. 24.

† Joshua xxiii. 13.

§ Proverbs xxii. 5.

¶ Isaiah lv. 13.

suffer for our sins, Christ suffered most of all in that He, who knew no sin, became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. It is not fanciful, but in accordance with the Bible symbolism, if we note that the thorns, which speak of our shame, were woven into *a crown* for Christ; for, while our sins are our ignominy, it is Christ's glory that He bare and took away our sins. It is not fanciful if, from the fact that Christ wore as a crown the sins which are our shame and punishment, we infer the hope that, as we become one with Him, our thorns will be woven into a crown for us, that even through evil we shall rise into a higher, larger, and more enduring good.

All these spiritual hints and suggestions are fairly set, like gems of the morning, in Christ's crown of thorns; and they are there that, as we gaze upon them, they may shine into our souls with healing lights of hope. He who wore the crown of thorns, in his infinite grace and pity, did offer Himself a willing sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sin of the whole world. For us men and our salvation He did suffer an agony and passion such as we can never know, can never so much as conceive; the thorns pierced his head, and not only his hands and his feet. Because He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God did highly exalt Him, and give Him a name that is above every name, making of our very thorns an honourable crown for his uplifted head. By his assumption of our nature, the Lord from heaven, the life-giving Spirit, did become the second Adam, and achieve a redemption wide as the world, a victory in which death was swallowed up of life. Through his grace—not through our sins, but through the grace which works through our sins and emancipates us from them—we do rise from natural into spiritual men, “and gain, for earthly Eden lost, a heavenly Paradise.” All the hints and

suggestions of the Crown of Thorns are confirmed by the revelation of the Divine Love in Christ Jesus our Lord. That it should be so full of hints of truth and hopeful suggestions, shews that, in this, God's wisdom was once more overruling the folly of men, his grace their malice ; that here, as in all things, He was bringing good out of evil, and compelling the very wrath of man to praise Him.

2. But if through the folly of man we have caught clearer and broader glimpses of the wisdom of God, let us now learn one of the deep practical secrets of that wisdom. The secret is: *That every true crown is a crown of thorns.* We are naturally intolerant of pain ; we shrink from suffering ; and therefore we are slow of heart to believe that pain is a condition of all pure joy, that only through suffering can we enter into peace and glory. The truth is familiar to us, indeed, for it is the constant teaching of the New Testament, the constant experience of our own lives. But familiar as it is to us, it is nevertheless unwelcome. In our dread—O foolish dread !—of pain and sorrow, we put it from us ; and hence we are often unprepared for our sorrows and pains when they come upon us. It may help us to receive and embrace this truth if we approach it by an unfamiliar path, such as our theme indicates.

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,” says our great poet ; but the aphorism must be qualified. To say the least of it, the uneasiness of kings may have many sources ; it does not always spring from the crown. A bad king may be rendered uneasy by every check on his despotic humours, by the prosperity or glory of his rivals, by every sign of growing freedom of thought and action in his subjects. *Our* kings are little more than kings in name : their pains and troubles, in so far as these are kingly, spring from sympathy with their ministers or their people, not from any grave political responsibility resting on *them*. But suppose

a king to be a king indeed, a king in the ancient sense. Suppose him, like David, really to make laws for his realm, to control the destinies of his subjects, to govern them at his will. In proportion as he is a true and noble king, his uneasiness will flow from a noble and royal source. He will task his powers to devise wise laws, to promote the interests of all classes of his subjects, to supply their wants, to train them in knowledge, capacity, freedom. If pestilence invade them, if the harvest fail, if floods rise, if in their ignorance they resist measures which he sees will be for their good, if he detect his magistrates in injustice, his officers in oppression,—whatever goes wrong will bring him pain and grief. And as accidents and offences will come, even in the most favoured lands and the best governed realms, the king will endure greater toils of thought, keener pangs of heart, than any of those for whom he lives and rules. All their troubles will be his troubles, their losses his losses, their shame his shame. His crown, in the very proportion in which he is worthy to wear it, will be lined with thorns.

The same law holds in every case in which men are called to rule, whatever the character of the realm, and whether their subjects be many or few. If you are a master and have a few men under authority, if you are a teacher and have a few children to train and control, even your crown will be a crown of thorns. Be hard, negligent, unjust ; be yielding, easy, careless ; and in either case you will inevitably have some trouble to face. Be wise, just, sympathetic ; really concern yourself for the welfare of those whom you rule and for the success of their toils ; and even thus you will not pluck the thorns from your crown : every accident that befalls your workmen or your pupils, every sign of indolence, or wastefulness, or quarrelsomeness, or vice on their part, will prick and sting you. Yet only as you suffer

these thorns, only as you heartily care for the men or children entrusted to you, only as you sadden in their disappointments, grieve over their sins, rejoice in their amendment, and hold yourself the richer for their gains, can you become a good master or a good teacher.

There is no escape for us. Every joy has its cost of pain; every honour must be won by labour and suffering. Even the student who isolates himself from his fellows and plunges into books, seeking to conquer knowledge and to rule his thoughts wisely, can only reach his end by toil and pain, by working when he is weary, by vigorously suppressing many natural cravings which, if indulged, would divert him from his aim. The father who would rule his children, and make home happy, must take much thought and pains. He must not only labour in order to provide food and education for his family, he must lay a wise, often a painful, restraint on his own habits, and looks, and words, lest he should injure them and undo the good effects of home, and school, and church. At times he must brace himself to correct their faults, not by random blows, or angry unconsidered words, or by severities of which he will be the first to tire, but with patience, forethought, steadfastness, at the cost often of a racking brain and a sore heart. Even when he has fairly drawn his children under rule, the thorns do not drop from his crown. For now that a tender and wise love has grown up between him and them, all their faults and sins more sharply pierce his heart; accidents befall them, and strike him with the deeper pain; or death seizes them, and his crown of fatherhood is all thorns.

Here, then, we begin to see why Christ's crown *must be* a crown of thorns. What other crown could the Perfect **Man** wear when the men He loved were so imperfect? or the Perfect King when his subjects, distrusting his wisdom, unwitting of his love, were in hot rebellion against

Him, and raised their hands against the Head before which they should have bowed in adoration? But if He could wear no crown but this, can we, who have his Spirit and are being conformed to his likeness, wear any crown but his? His very Spirit in us causes us to rule ourselves, to bring every high thought, every wandering and extravagant affection, into subjection to his pure law; to cast off all sinful habits, to follow after holiness and virtue. And this interior kingdom, which we are called to rule, has long been wasted by rebellion and strife; false lords have risen up in it and brought it into captivity; errors of thought hold many of our intellectual conceptions in chains; base passions have broken into mutiny, and usurped the dominion due to reason, and charity, and holiness: and we, poor kings that we are! have to conquer our kingdom before we can rule it. It is little more than "*the likeness of a crown*" which wreathes our helmet; but the thorns are there, and pierce through the steel. Whatever progress we have made, if even at rare intervals the whole realm of inward thought, and energy, and affection is brought into a happy consent of obedience and worship, the truce is soon broken. Hardly a day passes without our being made sorrowfully aware that some province of the soul is in fierce insurrection against the authority to which it made a show of yielding.

Nay, more: the self-same Spirit that calls us to rule ourselves also calls us to the conquest of the world, or of some little corner of it which, however small, is large enough to hold all the forces of the world and all the powers of darkness. We have to serve and help our neighbours—we who ourselves stand in such bitter need of help! We have to contend with the spiritual wickednesses which are in them—we who are so often overcome! Everywhere around us there is the same heavy task, the same unremitting and deadly conflict, which we find within. And how can we

achieve or contribute to that task save by manifold and exhausting labours? how be always in the thick of that conflict without taking as well as giving many wounds? If there were no interior contest, no constant toil at home, the sheer force of sympathy with our neighbours is at times enough to break our hearts, if at least we have our Master's spirit of love and pity. Think how many sorrows there are in the world, what deep and wide miseries, what innumerable and incurable evils! Nay, think how many even in our own narrow circles are at this very moment weeping bitter tears of regret, anguish, despair; how many faint in languor and pain; how many—and these the most pitiable of all—eat and drink, and laugh and swear, while the very soul is dying out of them, oppressed and strangled by the lusts of the flesh! If we are Christian in spirit as well as in name, if we have any share of our Master's purity, and tenderness, and grace, all these miseries and evils are as thorns in our crown. We cannot, we dare not, be indifferent to them. At times they tear and sting us well-nigh into despair, till, like Moses and Paul, we could wish ourselves blotted from the book of life, if only these poor souls might be healed and saved.

What then? Are we to yield to despair? Shall we relinquish the task of self-rule and service because it is hard? Shall we quit the field because the foe is strong, and the conflict bloody, and every arm is needed? Shall we say, "Such a task, such a conflict is beyond mortal strength?" *That* will only be to take the thorns without the crown. To yield to our base passions, to make no endeavour to stem the miseries of the world, is to become base and miserable: it is to become thorns in the crown of Christ and in that of all good men. No; let our resolve be, "Never to submit, nor yield, or even parley with the foe." It is through such pains and toils as these that we grow strong in spirit.

It is by such sufferings as these that we become perfect and win immortal honour. It is as we redouble our endeavours, as we give ourselves more stedfastly and earnestly to our task, and shew ourselves valiant in the conflict, that these thorns of pain and grief and bitter sympathy with human woes are platted into a crown more lustrous and honourable than fine gold and gems of price.

Christ's crown of thorns broke into flower long ago ; its sweet healing odours float through the heavenly temple, and are wafted over the earth by every wind that blows. Let us but be patient, stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, always shewing a good courage in the wars of the Lord ; and in due time our crowns, of which we should hardly be conscious now but for the thorns, will also blossom into flower, and will make us glad according to the days wherein they have afflicted us.

XXVI.

Simon Peter goes a-Fishing.

JOHN XXI. 3.

THE form of this passage is peculiar. Nothing in the Gospel of St. John has prepared us for it. It is not, I believe, to be matched from any other of the Gospels. If the sacred historian had simply told us that Seven of the Disciples went fishing on the Lake, there would have been nothing unusual or surprising in that. The strange thing is that, in describing so slight a matter, instead of maintaining the narrative tone, he is at the pains to report the very words of a conversation ; that he tells us exactly what Peter said and what his brethren replied. We shall feel how strange this is if we suppose the Gospel to be written in the same style throughout. Suppose, for instance, we read, "Simon Peter said, I am going up-stairs into the upper chamber ; they said to him, We also will go with thee : " or, "Simon Peter said, I sing a hymn ; they said to him, We will sing too." That surely would have been very tedious as well as very strange. And why St. John should have fallen into this style when he has nothing more to tell us than that Seven Disciples went a-fishing, it is by no means easy to say. It is so hard to say, that many Commentators are quite sure, for this among other reasons, that St. John never wrote these words ; they are quite sure, some, that the text is corrupt ; others, that the whole Chapter was written by another hand.

We need not, I hope and believe, resort to any such "heroic" or desperate expedient in order to account for the peculiar style in which this passage is written. The natural explanation of it, that which first suggests itself, is,—That the peculiarity of style denotes something peculiar in the event; that the Apostle gives us the very words of Simon Peter and his brethren because he thought them to be of very grave importance. Yet they do not seem of moment. Nothing could well seem of less moment than the fact, that seven fishermen went a-fishing. Nevertheless, I will try to shew that this apparently trivial fact was of such moment as to warrant any emphasis which St. John could lay upon it.

I. But to reach our term we must fetch a compass. We must go back at least to the night on which the Lord Jesus was betrayed. On that memorable night, He set forth his approaching death, not only in clear words of prediction, but also in those pathetic sacramental symbols which still wield a strange mystic power over all hearts. To that power "the Twelve" were not insensible. Their hearts were "troubled," "filled with sorrow." *Now* they seemed first to realize the thought that their Master was to be taken from them, and they left "comfortless," "orphaned" in the world. But, suddenly, across the darkened and tearful heaven of their thoughts there smiled a bow of hope. He, who had predicted his death, predicted his immediate resurrection from the dead, nay, promised that, so soon as He was risen, He would go *before them* into Galilee.* *Before they have returned from the Feast to their Galilean homes,* He will be there. Not many days hence, although his death must intervene, they may hope to see Him again, and to renew the intercourse with Him which even death itself could not break. Nay, more: He not only promises that

* Matt. xxvi. 32.

He will be in Galilee before them ; but, as we learn from St. Matthew,* He "appoints" a special "mountain" on which He will meet with them.

The Disciples forgot this promise ; and the Commentators seem to have forgotten it too. None of them, so far as I am aware, lays much stress on it, or appears to perceive how large a factor it was in the history of that time. Yet the Gospels lay great stress upon it. They not only record the promise ; they also record the extraordinary means taken to bring it to bear on the minds of the forgetful Disciples. Angels are sent from heaven to remind them of it. Christ Himself appears to put them in remembrance. The angel who sat on the stone of the sepulchre, shining on the astonished eyes of the holy women like "lightning" out of heaven, bade them "go quickly, and tell his disciples that He had risen from the dead ; and, behold, *He goeth before you*"—citing the very words of the promise†—"into Galilee ; there shall ye see Him." As they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his Disciples word, lo, Jesus Himself met them, and said to them,‡ "Go, tell my brethren, *that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*"

Now had the Disciples remembered this promise, had they acted on it when they were reminded of it, they would at once have started for their native Galilee, and hastened to "the mountain where Jesus had appointed them." Instead of weeping in their darkened city chamber, they would have breathed the bracing mountain air ; in place of mourning a dead or departed Lord, they would have rejoiced in his living gracious presence : for, however soon they reached the appointed mountain, we may be very sure that Christ would

* Matt. xxviii. 16.

† Comp. Matt. xxvi. 32 with Matt. xxviii. 7.

‡ Matt. xxviii. 9, 10.

have been there before them. The remissness and unbelief of the Disciples cannot fail to astonish us till we remember the overwhelming shock to their hopes involved in the death of their Master, till we remember, too, how often in our troubles *we* neglect or distrust many a comfortable and gracious word. They forget the gracious hopeful promise. They do not act upon it when they are reminded of it. They tarry in Jerusalem, although expressly commanded to go into Galilee. It is not till after a whole week, not till Christ had appeared to Cephas, to the Ten, to sceptic Thomas, that they leave Jerusalem for Galilee. Even when they repair to Galilee, they do not climb the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. They return to their homes; they linger round the shores of the Lake.

It is at this conjuncture that we meet them, or seven of them. Probably they had been in Galilee some days; possibly even a week or two; and still they have not seen the Master. Once more, despite the message of the angels and the women, they appear to have forgotten all about the appointed mountain. They know their Lord is no longer confined to this place or that; that He is somewhere in the invisible world, and may at any moment become visible to them. Untrammelled by physical limitations and restraints, it is nothing to Him where they are; it is just as easy for Him to shew Himself by the Lake as on the Mountain. Still He does not shew Himself, and the days wear on in anxious suspense and lessening hope. Four of the Eleven seem to have given up all expectation of ever seeing Him again; they have left the apostolic company. But the seven most prominent Apostles, earliest called and closest neighbours, still hang together, their hearts tormented with eager yet sad questionings, their hopes fast sickly over with the pale hues of doubt. "Why does He not come? Why does He not come? *Will* He come? Shall we *ever* see him again?"

At last Peter's heart, always a little impatient, fails him, and he cries, "I go a-fishing"—meaning, as I take it, "I give it up. He will not come. We are the mere fools of hope. Let us go back to our old state, and our old work." To suppose, as some do, that the Seven went out fishing to pass the time till their appointment with Christ fell due, is to forget all that they had done for many days before. They had *never* borne his promise in mind. They had not accepted the testimony of angels, nor obeyed the commands of Christ Himself. And we have no reason to conclude that in Galilee they were wiser or better men than they had been in Jerusalem. To infer that the Seven went fishing in order to secure the means of subsistence until they were sent forth to preach and live by the Gospel, is to forget that for three years they had been able to live without labour, that their temperate wants were easily supplied, and that even in Jerusalem they had no anxieties on that head, but seem to have been able to stay as long as they would. Nor does either of these hypotheses at all account for the emphasis which St. John lays on the fact, that the Seven went out in their boats to fish the lake. From his emphasis we may be sure that he regarded it as a critical event, the very details of which he was bound to record. I see no way to account for his emphasis but this:—*That the proposal to go a-fishing was the virtual renunciation of their hope to see Christ again before He went up on high.* Years before, he had decisively called them away from the craft by which they had their bread. They were to leave their boats and nets, to follow Him, to become fishers of men. That they now went back to their old craft, from which He had called them, appears a clear indication that they had begun to distrust their call, that they no longer expected to see Him on this side the grave, but felt that they must betake themselves to other work than that He had assigned them.

If this were the thought of their hearts, we need no prophet to tell us which of them would be the first to express it. Peter, ever ready of lip, and of that sanguine temperament which soonest reacts into despair, would be sure to speak before the rest, to put their thoughts into words.

We might have foreseen, too, that even St. Peter, bold as he was of speech, would shrink from saying in so many words, "I give up hope : I distrust the promise ;" that he would hint his thought in indirect phrase, and leave his brethren to infer its full import : that he would say, "I go a-fishing," and let them put their own interpretation on his words. If we have rightly caught his meaning, if, as I believe, he was here repeating in a new form that denial of Christ which he had so bitterly repented, he is not altogether without excuse. The last month of his life had been full of keen excitements. He had gone through agonies which were only inferior to those of his Master. He might well be exhausted, and, in his spiritual exhaustion, perilously open to temptation. And his temptation was very great. For what more trying than protracted suspense, when on its issues hangs death or life ? If, after weeks of intense spiritual tension, our fate were to hang in the balance day after day ; if, as the days passed, we were brooding on the thought, "Now, now, O surely now at last, I shall know whether I am to live or die : " should not we be apt at times to sink into despair and forbode the worst ? *That* was Peter's trial. Day by day he was thinking, "Surely the Lord will come to-day, if He mean to come at all ! surely to-day ! " Is it any wonder that at last, sick at heart with deferred hope, he gave up hope, and was glad to get out of all that sickening suspense of thought into rough hard work ? There lay the smiling beautiful lake, the boats he had so often sailed, the nets he had so often fingered : what a relief to a mind all perturbed and broken with sorrowful disappointments to

plunge once more into the familiar toils which would at least brace his energies and restore the lost sense of reality !

We must make some allowance for St. Peter, then, for his temptation was great ? Yes ; but we must not forget that if Peter had been in his right place, if he had been on the mountain where Jesus had appointed him, the temptation would not have been there. We must not forget that, on the Mountain, hope would have risen into glad fruition instead of sinking into despair. Nor may we forget that, in assuming to speak out his thought, Peter took a new burden of responsibility on himself, a burden he could very hardly bear. The Six probably thought, as he thought, that hope was gone, that it was well-nigh time to take to other work than that to which they had been called by Christ. But it was Peter's "I go a-fishing" which brought out their "We also go with thee." His word fell on hearts very ready to kindle ; but, had he not spoken it, their hearts might never have burst into flame. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," was the Lord's injunction to Simon. Had he obeyed it, had he said to his dejected comrades, "Brethren, hope still ; we have always found Him true, and I for one will never cease to trust Him," the story would have had a happier close : those who said "We also go with thee," when he cried "I go a-fishing," had he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," would have replied, "We too will trust Him." There is a mysterious and terrible power in words ; and he who, faithless himself, suggests an evil course to hearts of an imperfect fidelity, will have something more to answer for than his own sin.

II. But let us follow the Seven into their boat, and see how it fared with them in their fishing. It fared by no means happily. They had put off at evening, toiled all night, and caught nothing. Yet the Lake was full of fish,

and they cast their net on this side of the boat and on that. A hard lot theirs—when they must give up catching men for catching fish, and can't even do that! All their knowledge of the water and practised skill avail them nothing. How should it, when they had forsaken the work appointed them by God for a work of their own choosing? When He comes to their help, when at dawn *Christ* stands on the shore, and bids them cast their net, and tells them where to cast it, they catch fish enough, more than a hundred and fifty great fish, so that they cannot haul their net, but have to drag it after them to the beach.

Was there no teaching for them in this? Did not the constant failure of that toilsome night warn them that fishing was not their work? Did it not remind them that Christ had called them away to a higher task, and suggest that they had done wrong in wilfully declining on the lower task from which He had summoned them? Let *us* at all events learn that we can only hope to thrive when we take our daily tasks as ordained for us by Him; that so soon as we leave the work He has given us for tasks of our own choosing, we have only too good reason for calculating on failure and disappointment.

Many sad and desponding anxieties must have troubled the Seven on their night of unsuccessful toil; but of all thoughts the most frequent and sad would be, I suppose, that the gracious Master whom they had loved so well had forsaken them, and that, now He had left them, nothing would thrive with them. Of course we cannot tell exactly what shape their thoughts took. They were ignorant superstitious men; and their superstition and ignorance would colour their conceptions of Him, and make them unworthy of Him. They would have no doubt, I conceive, that He was in the remote invisible world, no longer hovering near the confines of the earth as He had done during the days

which immediately followed the resurrection. They may have conceived of Him as in "Abraham's bosom," in that fair Paradisaical garden in which the Hebrews thought their fathers were gathered, sitting down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, with Moses and Elijah, with David and Isaiah, partaking with them of the sweet fruits and services of the celestial garden, talking with them of the secrets of the kingdom of God, and too intent on such high themes to remember the poor sinful men He had left behind Him in the world. But whatever form their thoughts assumed, there can be little doubt they made up their minds that they should never see Him again on earth, that He had forgotten them, or did not so remember them as to care for them and help them. Every time they drew in their empty nets the conviction would grow on them that, despite his kind parting words, they could no longer hope to enjoy his presence and the happy succours his presence had always brought them. The clouded heavens of that mournful night, its chill winds, its unfruitful sea, would appear apt emblems of their future life now that they were left "comfortless" in the world.

We know, indeed, that it was they who had forgotten Him, not He who had forgotten them; that, had they remembered his promise and fulfilled its conditions, they would have found Him better than his word. But *they* did not know that as yet, though they were soon to learn the lesson.

The night passed, as the longest night will; and, as the cold morning slowly dawned down the hills and across the Lake, there stands Jesus on the shore, although "they knew not that it was Jesus." Even his familiar salutation, "*My children—My children, have ye aught to eat?*" awakens no answering chord of memory in their hearts. It is not till He repeats the miracle which had signalized their first call

to his service that even the keen eye of love detects the Presence so long desired, so little hoped for, and John cries out in blissful rapture, "It is the Lord!"

It *was* the Lord. *Had* He forgotten them, or ceased to care for them? Ah, no; for, see, a cheerful fire burns on the strand; fish are broiling on "the coals," loaves are baking; and Jesus, in the old tones of considerate love, cries, "Come, children, and breakfast with me!" Ah, no; He has not forgotten them, nor been unmindful of their toil, and cold, and hunger; He has made provision for their need, and welcomes them to the meal his care has prepared.

I can well believe that Simon Peter broke his fast upon his tears. Now, as once before when he had denied his Master, he may have "gone out," even from that gracious Presence, to weep bitterly, and to bruise his hasty unbelieving breast with heavy strokes of compunction. And when the Lord turned upon him with the question, "Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou me?" he might well be "grieved;" for, though he could appeal to the Searcher of all hearts to attest his love, he could not but feel that, notwithstanding his genuine love for the Master, he had once more proved faithless and not believing.

And is not the whole story true to *our* experience? How often do we forget the gracious promises we have received, and on which we should stay our hearts! How often do they seem unreal, impalpable, unreliable, remote from actual life, even when we are reminded of them! How often do we fail to fulfil the conditions of the promise, and then complain that God has forgotten us and his word to us!

How often also, thank God, do we find Him caring for us when we have failed to trust in Him, and blessing us although we have not obeyed his command—meeting us although we have not climbed the appointed mountain,

giving us a good success in our labours, although we have for a time lifted our weak faithless hands from the work which He assigned us! How often does the voice of Infinite Love cry to us, "Children, children, come from the cold and darkness of faithless toils and defeated hopes to the light of my grace, the comfort of my rest, the peace and joy of communion with me!" If we believe not, He is faithful; He cannot deny Himself, though we deny Him. And that He may not deny Himself, that his kind promises may be fulfilled in and upon us, He compels us, by failure and disappointment and grief, to come to the mountain where He has appointed us, to climb those steep slopes of duty on which He would have us walk; or He follows us in our wanderings, standing by the sea on which we are tossed, that we may leave it, and follow Him to the mountain—alluring us by a present kindness to a kindness greater still.

Last of all, if this story be true to our past experience, it is also true of experiences which are yet to come, and from the very thought of which we sometimes shrink. "The morning is dawning; the grey of night going away; the lake is still; and yonder, standing on the shore, in the uncertain light, there is one dim figure, and one disciple catches sight of Him, and another casts himself into the water; and they find a fire of coals and fish laid thereon and bread; and Christ gathers them round his table, and they all know that 'it is the Lord!'" *That* is an apt symbol of "what the death of the Christian may well become;—the morning dawning, and the finished work, and the figure standing on the quiet beach, so that the last plunge into the cold flood that yet separates us will not be taken with trembling reluctance; but, drawn to Him by the love beaming out of his face, and upheld by the power of his beckoning presence, we shall struggle through the latest wave that parts us, and scarcely feel its chill, nor know that

we *have* crossed it ; till falling blessed at his feet, we see by the clearer vision of his face, that this is indeed heaven. And looking back on 'the sea that brought us thither,' we shall behold its waters flashing in the light of that everlasting morning, and hear them breaking into music on the eternal shore. And then, brethren, when all the weary night-watchers on the stormy ocean of life are gathered together around Him who watched with them from his throne on the bordering mountains of eternity, where the day shines for ever—then will He seat them at his table in his kingdom, and gird Himself, and come forth to serve them ; and none shall need to ask, 'Who art Thou?' or 'Where am I?' for all shall know that it is the Lord, and the full, perfect, unchangeable vision of his blessed face will be heaven."*

* From "Sermons by Alexander Maclaren, B.A. First Series." Published by Macmillan.

XXVII.

The Parting Benediction.—A Sermon.

ST. LUKE XXIV. 50—53.

C RITICAL events set apart and hallow the localities in which they occur. The place in which we have suffered any of the great sorrows of life, or rejoiced in any of its nobler prosperities, becomes to us a holy place ; our thoughts revert to it with a loving pertinacity, investing it with the sacredness or delightsomeness of the events which happened to us there : hence the charm which attaches to the home of our youth, the sacredness which attaches to our father's grave. Unconsciously, we invest the early home with charms drawn from the dew and freshness of our youth, the parental grave with hues drawn from the love and sorrow of bereavement.

It is singular, too, that at the approach of death, when we stand on the threshold of the future world, when, therefore, if ever, our thoughts might be supposed to rest exclusively on what is before us, men not unfrequently look back on the earlier experiences and scenes of their life, yearning with importunate desire to revisit the places in which their first joys and sorrows were met, to round off their life by ending where they began. Very touching have been the utterances of this desire, both in the old and the young. Their parting spirits have often seemed detained by it, as though they *could* not pass away until the wish were gratified, as though Death himself must wait until they reached

the home ; while at other times the art-magic of strong desire has caused the familiar scenes to rise, real and beautiful as of old, and pass before their eyes, while they lay "a-dying" in foreign lands.

Now, it is one of the cardinal virtues of the Lord Jesus Christ, one of his chief qualifications for the mediatorial work, that He was, and is, "touched with a feeling of our infirmities," that He can and did enter into all the innocent humanities of our nature. He was no cold, unimpassioned, abstract man. In Him were all the tendernesses, preferences, and unselfish prejudices of human love. He could like one man more than another—John was his bosom friend : one people more than another—He had not "come, save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel ;" one family more than another—for it was with a peculiar affection that He loved Martha, and Mary her sister, and Lazarus whom He raised from the dead. He could also like one place more than another ; for when his last earthly day was come He led his disciples up the slope of Olivet, "as far as to Bethany." On this mountain he had often prayed ; of its two chief districts, Gethsemane and Bethany, the one was the scene of his passion, the other the home of his friends. From its side and summit He could look down on the hill Calvary, where He was crucified, and on that regardless city which had led Him "without the gate." The places which had been hallowed by the most momentous and sacred events of his human life, in which He had drunk most deeply of the cup of his sorrows, and had divinest foretastes of "the joy set before him," all lay beneath his eye. His last look fell on the slopes on which He had spent nights of prayer, the city in which He had lived his most laborious days, the house in which He had rested and been loved, the garden in which He had agonized, the hill on which He had died, the sepulchre in which He had slept.

He rose from amidst the scenes which were consecrated to Him by love and sorrow, by labour and by prayer. To the last a sharer in our humanity, displaying to the last a human yearning and tenderness, his final lingering look took in not only the friends who had "compained with Him from the beginning," but also the places which had been hallowed to Him by the events of his earthly career.

It is surely very pleasant to see in Christ what we feel in ourselves, to note these correspondences between his manhood and ours. For why has Christ become like us, save that we may become like Him? Why has He partaken our human nature, save that we may be made the "partakers of his divine nature?" Why has He taken our infirmities on Him, save that we may be "filled with all the fulnesses of God?"

But we must not linger on this theme, pleasant and hopeful as it is. The director teachings of the passage claim our thoughts. Let us select two or three of them.

I. We may learn from it that *Christ leaves us, not always in anger, but often in benediction.* "And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." To *be* and to *feel* forsaken by Christ are two very different things, though we often confound them. He often *leaves* us when he does not *forsake* us. To mourn an absent Christ may be a stronger proof of love and a better discipline of life than to rejoice in a present Christ. Do these paradoxes seem incredible to you? Do you ask for proof? Well, there is proof enough and to spare. That Christ's absence, or the sense of it, does not imply that He has forgotten, much less forsaken, those who love Him, was the very lesson which He set Himself to teach his disciples during the days that preceded his death; it was the very lesson, by teaching them which He strove to prepare them

for his departure into heaven. How He taught them this lesson, by what a wise and loving discipline, is worthy of far deeper and more protracted study than we can give it here and now; it is one of the most beautiful features of his whole ministry: yet let us take one or two specimens of it.

Only a few days before his crucifixion, He sends Peter away to the sea, bidding him cast in, not a net, but a hook; predicting that in the mouth of the very first fish that took the bait he should find the stater—not any coin, but a certain Roman coin of a defined value—which their exigencies required. He does as he is bid, and finds it even as he was told. Peter is thus taught that the prescience and power of Christ are unrestrained; that, present or absent, on the sea or the dry land, all elements and all the creatures of the elements, hearken to his voice and delight to do his will; he is thus taught that even when Christ is not present to his friends, even when He has left them, He is still with them, and with them to fulfil his word, although an endless array of contingencies seem to forbid its fulfilment.

Again, and within a few days, He sends two of his disciples to Bethphage to find an ass and a colt, and bring them unto Him. He predicts the very objection the owners afterward made, and puts into his disciples' mouths words which even these owners were not able to withstand. So, also, He sends other two to a place where three ways met to find a slave bearing a pitcher, and to follow him to an upper chamber furnished for the Passover. In both cases chances and contingencies seem needlessly multiplied; the disciples have to run the risk of suspicion, and of insult, and of suffering as evil-doers. And yet in both we find the traces of a most wise and loving discipline. Christ was about to leave them. They were poor and mean men; they might think themselves forgotten, overlooked. Christ teaches them that even while absent from them He is yet with them, directing their steps,

providing for their welfare ; that, whether He has left them, or sent them away from Him, He is still present with them, present to guide, defend, bless. He teaches them that *even when not there* He knows what is transpiring at Bethphage and Jerusalem ; knows not only what Herod, and Pilate, and the chief priests, and Pharisees, are doing, but also of what is being done by the lowly and the enslaved ; that He can see and foresee the poor slave going with his pitcher to the fountain of the Three Ways, and the ass and her colt standing at the door of the caravanserai ; that his prescience extends even to the furnishing of an upper room, that his power can touch the heart of the distant householder.

Now, it is quite impossible, I think, to connect and consider these historic facts, without perceiving that they are part of that wise and loving discipline of which I have spoken ; without perceiving that Christ was preparing his disciples for his departure, teaching them that distance could not separate from Him, nor remove them beyond the reach whether of his eye or his hand. The obvious meaning of them was, that as He could penetrate the depths of the sea and guide its creatures at his will, so also He would look down on *them* from the heights of heaven and direct them in all their ways ; that as his eye was on the slave by the well and in the upper chamber furnished for the Passover, so also his eye would be on them, poor and despised though they were, and his hand prepare a table for them : that as from the mountain He touched the heart of the householder in the city, and constrained their owners to give up the ass and her colt in the village, so also when absent from them He would incline the hearts of men toward them and restrain the rage of their opponents. “ As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings,” shews them the use of the pinion and makes them use it, driving them from the nest that they may learn to fly ; or, as a mother

tries her child's strength, withdrawing and returning her hand, before she sends him forth to walk alone ; so the Lord Jesus before He went up on high taught his disciples to use the wing of faith, taught them to walk alone—trying them, proving them, sending them away, suffering them to return, that when He was carried up into heaven and received out of their sight they might be able to dispense with his visible presence, might know that though He had *left* He had not *forsaken* them.

Alas ! they did not profit by this preparatory discipline as they should have done. When He was first taken away, taken by death, they lost all hope, forgetting the lesson He had taught. Yet it was not wholly wasted on them. When He was taken away the second time, carried up into heaven, they understood what was meant as, "*while He blessed them* He was parted from them." They did not lose hope now ; they *knew* that He had not forsaken, albeit He had left them, and so they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

That discipline was given for their sake ; it is recorded for ours. Christ often seems to leave us, to go up from earth into an inaccessible heaven. For a brief season we feel that He is with us. We rejoice in his nearness. Divine joys flow from his presence. The sweetnesses of an intimate fellowship are vouchsafed us. He speaks to us, and his words awaken responses which echo songfully through all the courts of our souls. To his "Seek ye my face," we respond, "Thy face will we seek ;" to his "Give me thine heart," "Our hearts are Thine." The sacrifices of obedience are cheerfully paid. We sing and give praise. The indwelling Christ, the Shekinah of the heart, fills the inner temple of the soul with his glory. We gain insight ; we grow in grace ; we feel the powers and graces of the Divine life unfolding themselves within us. But, at the best, such seasons are of the briefest. Very commonly they are succeeded by times

of comparative deadness and exhaustion. The Christ seems to have withdrawn his presence. "We weary the heavens with the inquest of our beseeching looks," but no sign is given. We turn our eyes inward to find the temple deserted, the sacrifice consumed, the sacred fire burned out, the Shekinah invisible. And we mourn and complain. We say Christ has left, has forsaken, us. And yet why should we? Adoring contemplation is to be only our occasional attitude. We have a warfare and a work. Our hands must not only be lifted up in prayer, but armed for conflict and engaged in toil. It is good to be with Christ on the mount. It is also good to come down from the mount and labour with, and for, our fellow-men. Let us remember that, "while He blessed us He was parted from us," and that his benediction was given to strengthen us for work and for endurance. He has withdrawn but for a time, and that we may learn how far, our manhood has been replenished by fellowship with Him, how far the Divine nature now dwells in us and is independent of outward aids. He has but sent us from Him that He may teach us we can never wander beyond his reach, that we may find his prescience and power displayed in scenes and modes in which we looked not for them. *We* think it would be best to be always with Him. *He* knows that it is good for us to be sent away on his errands, to meet the demands men make on Him, or to urge his demands on them, or to overget their opposition to Him and to us; in all to behold the manifestations of his grace and truth.—And this leads us to our second lesson, viz., that

II. *Christ's benediction, even though it be a parting one, should inspire joy and thankfulness.* "And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." The disciples, as I have said, had not been

taught and disciplined altogether in vain. At last they had learned what a parting benediction meant: "Use faith instead of sight; leave contemplation for labour; express your love, not in looks and words, but in patient waiting and strenuous toil; rise from the lower blessedness of 'receiving' to the higher blessedness of 'giving.'" Possibly, as they went up the Mount of Olivet as far as to Bethany, they had thought, "Never were men so blessed as we; never were we so blessed as now." Christ had risen, and yet was with them, more glorious, and yet to the full as gracious as ever, lavishing on them the looks and tones of an eternal love. But they were to touch even a higher blessedness than this; and they were to touch it in crowded streets, and opposing throngs, in prisons, at the stake, and on the cross. A few short weeks ago, and they had not conceived any higher honour than that of beholding Christ in his glory. They had said, "It is good to be here and thus; let us build tabernacles and abide here." But the discipline through which they had passed, the errands on which they had been sent, the works they had been given to do, the sorrows they had been called to endure—this discipline has opened their eyes to a yet higher honour and service, that of reflecting and reproducing Christ's glory, that of "filling up the remnant of his afflictions," and carrying on his work of mercy. Hence they can "worship" Him even while He departs from them, and return to the Jerusalem which He has left "praising and blessing God."

Now, there are two modes in which Christ is parted from *us*, two reasons why He hides Himself from us. We may "grieve" Him away, cause Him to depart by lapsing into our old sins; or it may be "expedient" for us, may conduce to our spiritual culture, that we should lose the sense of his presence. In this latter case "He blesses us *while He is parted from us*;" in the former He blesses us *by departing from us*.

He blesses us, I say, *by departing from us*. For consider what it is you seek, or rather what it is that Christ seeks to make of you, and give you. He is seeking to make you not simply happy and at ease, but holy and loving; to give you, not a mere sensual vulgar enjoyment, not a mere present passing happiness, but a far deeper and more blessed thing—the peace which flows from a perfected manhood, from being altogether made like to Him. Whatever *your* thought may be, *his* thought concerning you is, not merely that your sins shall be transferred to his account, and his righteousness to yours; but that your sins shall, by whatever painful processes, be really purged out of you, and that by a real spiritual development you shall grow up into his righteousness. It is a very small thing whether or not you are at ease, free from disquietude of heart, at this moment or that; but it is a very great thing, to you the greatest of things, that at every moment you should be growing pure and wise, entering more and more fully into the Divine life. He did not draw back from suffering Himself; He became perfect through suffering: and He will not withhold needful suffering from you; his very mercy will constrain Him to send it, that you also may be made perfect. When, therefore, you sin against Him, what wiser or kinder thing can He do than depart from you, and make you feel that He has departed? Nothing will convince you of your sin if that will not. Nothing will make you repent and forsake your sin if that fail. You have *then* to lament, not the clouds which obscure your heaven, but the bitter waters of evil from which they have been drawn. Shining on these, what can the Sun of Righteousness draw from them but mist and cloud? You cannot be too sorry that you have grieved Christ; you cannot be too thankful that, when you grieve Him, He departs,—by his departure making you sensible of your offence. *That* is the highest benediction you can then receive.

But, again, Christ may not only bless *by* parting from you, He may also bless *while parting from you*. That is, He may go away, may deprive you of the sense of his presence, not because you have offended Him, but because He has been teaching you new lessons and would have you practise them, because He has been conferring new gifts and graces upon you and would have you use them. He has been leading you into some new path of duty, up some new height of experience, and now He withdraws his hand to see whether you can walk alone; He leaves you to yourself, that He may test your fidelity and strength, and, by testing, augment them. It was thus with "the Seventy." Christ taught them, trained them, blessed them, and then sent them forth "as sheep among wolves;" sent them forth, timid, imperfect, unheroic though they were, to do battle with the cruellest and most fatal prejudices and enmities. But the conflict revealed in them unexpected powers; they now learned how much Christ had done for them and given them while they were yet with Him—learned it with wonder and delight: astonished at their own triumph, they came back exclaiming, "Even the devils are subject to us!" He blessed them in, and while, being parted from them.

Or, again, Christ may *wish* to teach us new lessons, to impart the powers and graces which can only be acquired in the School of Sorrow. We may have embodied our partial conceptions of truth in doctrinal formulas which, once helps, have become hindrances to us; or, through dwelling always in one set of circumstances, we may have acquired one-sided habits of thought and feeling which mar our service and contract our souls. Look, for instance, at Job. He was an "upright" man, "perfect" even in his loyalty to such truths as he knew. He could charge himself with no sin, and God charges him with none. But Job held a dogma which was only partially true, which therefore was

perniciously untrue. He held that outward prosperity was the proof and reward of righteousness, that suffering was the invariable consequence of personal sin. You see how this doctrinal formula was likely to vitiate his creed and contract his sympathies, how it would provoke to self-esteem and uncharity, making him hard in his judgments of the poor and unprosperous, inciting him to find in his own enlarging prosperity the proof of his own righteousness and good desert. Well, God teaches him his error by introducing new facts into his experience, by permitting an adverse change on all his circumstances. At first, Job tries to make the old formula cover the new facts, but he soon learns that it is too narrow; he soon comprehends that suffering, instead of proving personal sin, may be a proof of the Divine love; that it may be sent for culture, and not in anger; that even the tree which does bring forth fruit may be "purged that it may bring forth more fruit." Job, too, had been just, generous, princely in his prosperity. "When the ear heard him, then it blessed him; when the eye saw him, it gave witness unto him." But the nobler virtues of adversity—what had there been to develop these? In these he failed so soon as "God put forth his hand and touched all that he had." That he might be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing," God compels him to acquire these. In the school of adversity he acquires meekness, patience, long-suffering, and their kindred graces. Job would not have been so long under the rod had he been an apter scholar; *nor should we*. When at last, and with many tears, he had learned his lesson, "he worshipped" and gave thanks for the teaching vouchsafed him; *so also should we*. To lose the consciousness of Christ's presence that we may grow wise or strong, that we may be cleansed from error and made perfect in holiness—what is this but to have Christ blessing us while He is parted from us? And if in

our loneliness, if while seeking after Him we do gain insight or grace, have we not reason to "return with joy, praising and blessing Him?" He may have left us, as He left his disciples, only to be more intimately with us, taking away the blessings of his presence only to make them more divinely ours.

You ask, perhaps, "Are we, then, to take up Peter's word, 'Depart from me, O Lord; I am a sinful man?'" God forbid. We are not to *ask*, but to *acquiesce* in Christ's departure. We are simply to rest assured that, whether present or absent, He is seeking our highest welfare, is affording us the very discipline we need. We are simply to joy and rejoice in his benediction, even though, while He bestows it, He should be "received up out of our sight."—Finally, we may learn from this passage, that—

III. *The sense of Christ's absence should lead us to the place of his perpetual presence.* "They returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God." The Temple was the place of Divine manifestation. God's "way" was "in the sanctuary." Christ had been taken from them, but the Temple remained. It seemed sad enough, no doubt, to come away from the mountain to the crowded metropolis,—instead of beholding the grace and truth of Christ, to look on the priests who had crucified Him, and on sacrifices "which could not take away sin." It must have been like going back into the old shadow-land from which Christ had delivered them. But it was right to go. Now that Christ, the living Temple of God, was taken up into heaven, and until the Holy Ghost came down from heaven to open his temple in their hearts, they could do nothing better than carry their praises and hopes into the ancient house of God. The divinest means of grace they had ever known had been taken away, but

they would not therefore neglect what means were left. Diviner means of grace were promised them and were drawing nigh, but they would not therefore neglect what means they had. And they had their reward. They found Christ in the Temple, or rather were found of Him. The day of Pentecost came, even as He had said, and with it gifts and labours. The Holy Ghost fell upon them. The Spirit gave them utterance. They preached Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, winning to his faith and service thousands of those who had just delivered Him to death.

They have taught us a lesson, left us an ensample. Had they "stood gazing up into heaven," hoping to see Christ return, their hope would have made them ashamed; they would not have "received the promise of the Father." Their Master's command was, "Wait for that promise at Jerusalem." They obeyed, and in their obedience lies our lesson.

For in our times of desertion and consequent dejection of heart, we have all found it very hard, I suppose, to use the common means of grace, or to discharge the common duties of life. We would fain indulge our grief. The service of the Sanctuary seems to have no blessing for us; the daily duty and the patient waiting in the discharge of duty grow very wearisome to us. To sit silent on the ground, or to break forth into bitter complaints, accords better with our mood than to stand in the Temple praising and blessing God. We had rather imitate Job than the apostles, rather brood over our sorrow than engage in service. Yet all this, natural as it is, is utterly unwise and wrong. Mere grief and bitterness of heart—because something has been taken away crying over what is left, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit"—will do us harm and not good. *In obedience and worship* lies our only hope. However long we delay, *must* at last follow the apostles. Job suffered much through his

delay, and after all had to do what the apostles did. It was not till he had "seen God," till he had risen from the heap of ashes to offer "sacrifice," that "the Lord turned his captivity." The apostles were wiser in their generation. They *hastened* to worship and obey. And so with you. Christ may seem to have forsaken both the outer sanctuary and the inner temple of the heart; obedience may be distasteful, the public service may seem unprofitable: but only as you bring the daily sacrifices of obedience and seek the Lord in his sanctuary will your captivity be turned. It is not yours to "sit upon the ground," or to "stand gazing up into heaven." You have received commands; obey them. You have received promises; seek their fulfilment in the Temple. The day of Pentecost will surely come. The Spirit will give you utterance. "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple," to renew his manifestation and to rekindle your joy.

And in this hope, dear brethren, many of you have doubtless come up hither to-day. To some of you the spiritual experiences which I have ventured to describe are quite familiar. It may be that contact with the cares of life, or exposure to the perpetual sollicitations of sense, or the weary never-ending conflict with temptation, or the pressure of sorrowful self-condemning thoughts, or the mere dulling influence of the mechanic round of duties in which you walk, or even the exhaustion which comes of pleasurable excitement, or, saddest of all, brooding and bitter regrets for trespasses into which you have fallen—it may be that some one of these things, or that several of them combined, have darkened and deadened your spirits. You feel that there is silence and desolation in the inward temple; that your faith goes groping after God with unexpectant and almost blinded eyes. Christ has parted from you—gone up into some inaccessible heaven. The fountains of spiritual

strength and joy are sealed up. Only his touch can open them ; and you cannot find Him, though you have sought Him carefully and with tears. And so you have come to the Sanctuary, the place of his perpetual presence, hoping that He will once more manifest Himself unto you. Be of good cheer, O forlorn and darkened heart ! Weary and heavy-laden, you have yet come to Him, and He *will* give you rest. His word is pledged ; his deeds have pledged Him. He who of old left his disciples on the mountain that He might meet them in the Temple, parting from them for a while that He might gladden them with his perpetual presence and the gifts of his Spirit, ceasing to be *with* them that He might be *in* them—He will also meet with you and dwell in you. Only wait and worship, and He will come ; and, with Him, light and strength and joy !

XXVIII.

Giving and Taking.

ACTS XX. 35.

IN the pathetic speech in which St. Paul bade farewell to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, who were to see his face no more, after appealing to their knowledge of his disinterested labours among them—"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities"—he affirms that he always taught them to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he used to say, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Now when and where did the Lord Jesus say that? "There lives no record of reply." The saying is not contained in any one of the Gospels. St. Paul is not quoting any Scripture, but an oral tradition. Nor do the Gospels give, or profess to give, a complete narrative of all that Jesus said or did. They simply profess to set forth in order the things which were most commonly and surely believed in the infant Church. Indeed, the last Gospel, in its last verse, warns us that Jesus both did and said many things which are not recorded. In his splendid hyperbole, St. John states the reason which compelled selection, alleging that if all the sayings and actions of Christ "should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Many sayings of the Lord Jesus must therefore have been familiar to the

apostles, and have been current in the primitive Church, which are not to be found in the Sacred Records. The words which St. Paul made his constant theme at Ephesus composed one such saying—the only one, I believe, which adorns the subsequent pages of the New Testament.

I. But are none other of these sayings to be recovered? Were there no good men in the primitive Church to gather up the fragments of our Lord's speech, that nothing might be lost? The answer to that question is a somewhat singular one, and not what we might have expected. There were good men, disciples who sat at the feet of John, Peter, Paul—men such as Barnabas, Polycarp, Ignatius, Clement—and who gathered from apostolic lips many words spoken by Jesus which have not come down to us. And these men, and their immediate disciples, wrote books which, in whole or in part, are in our hands. Yet, while from their writings we might almost replace the entire Gospel story, had the inspired records been lost, they make hardly any additions to it. Now and then they attribute words to the Lord Jesus which are not contained in the Sacred Narrative; but for the most part they are simply repetitions, slightly varied, of sayings that are contained in the Gospels; or they are quotations made from memory, and therefore slightly varying from the original. Hardly a score sayings of the Lord Jesus not included in the New Testament can now be recovered from the writings of the bishops and fathers of the primitive Church, from all the writings of all the holy men who lived for two centuries after Christ's death. On about a score of these sayings, however, scholars are pretty well agreed that they may be accepted as genuine; they assure us that in all probability they were uttered by the Lord Jesus, although, like the saying quoted by St. Paul, they are nowhere recorded in the

Gospels. Of these we shall briefly glance at about one half.

The traditional saying of the Lord Jesus most frequently used by the Christian writers of the apostolic time, and the times immediately following that of the Apostles, is this :— "*Be ye good [or approved] money-changers.*" This saying was in great vogue. That it is genuine is well-nigh beyond a doubt. It is applied in various ways. Some of the early bishops of the Church use it, for instance, to illustrate St. Paul's maxim, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Try, they say, all dogmas, spirits, prophecies; ring them like coin, and keep only those which ring true. This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, "Be ye good money-changers." Others find a deeper meaning in the words, and these say: To every man the Lord distributes talents according to his several ability; and the secret of life is to so invest and expend these talents, that at his coming He may receive his own again with usury, and that we may receive the reward of those who have wisely traded with their talents and made them more. Let us, therefore, listen to the Lord, and shew ourselves approved money-changers.

A second traditional saying is given in these two forms :— "*In whatsoever I find you* (said our Lord Jesus Christ), *in that will I judge you;*" and again, "*Such as I find thee, will I judge thee* (saith the Lord)." In both forms it is in strict accordance with the rule of Divine judgment which pervades the whole Bible. Everywhere we are taught that we shall receive according to the deeds done in the body;—that what we are will determine what we are to be.

In St. Matthew's Gospel we are taught that Jesus wrought miracles of healing in order "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet: Himself bare our infirmities, and carried our sicknesses." Origen simply gives us **an expansion and illustration of this passage in**

words which he attributes to the Lord Jesus : " Jesus saith : *For the sick, I was sick ; for the hungry, I hungered ; and for the thirsty, I suffered thirst.*"

Or again, what can be in more perfect harmony with our Saviour's warning, that only as we take up the cross can we follow Him, than another saying—a saying attributed to the Lord Jesus by no less a person than Barnabas ? "*Those who are fain to see me, and to lay hold of my kingdom, must receive me in sorrow and much affliction.*"

There are some words which have the very ring of the Gospel in them, and on which, if at least we are good money-changers, we shall not fail to discern the image and superscription of the Great King. Such a saying one of the early fathers heard from St. Matthew. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "*Be ye never joyful except when ye look on your brother in love,*" a saying which breathes the very spirit of Christian charity.

We are all familiar with the command, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you ;" and a saying attributed to Christ by more than one of the fathers cannot, therefore, be strange to us in the spirit, if the letter be new : "*Ask the great things, and the little things shall be added unto you ; ask also the heavenly things, and the earthly shall be added unto you.*"

Judgment begins at the house of God. Only through much tribulation can we enter the kingdom of God. Of these old truths, which we have had from the beginning, we have a new illustration in a noble proverbial saying, which, in one of two forms, many of the early disciples received as from the lips of Jesus Himself : "*He that is near me is near the fire ; and he that is far from me is far from the kingdom.*" And again : "*Near the sword, near God ; far from the sword, far from God.*" And, indeed, the sword

and the fire are very close neighbours to Christ—the sword that separates us from fleshly lusts, and the fire which purges away our sins.

In St. Matthew we read: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant; and whosoever will be first among you, let him be your slave: even as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for the many." To this passage an ancient MS. copy of the Gospel adds: "*And seek ye to increase from little, and from greater to be less.*" The genuineness of this saying is commonly admitted; certainly it is quite in the heavenly manner. It is just one of those deep enigmatical sayings, of which so many fell from the lips of Him who spake in parables. Its meaning seems to be: if you are "little" in the world's esteem or in the Church's esteem, and have but a few talents, seek to make them more, to become "great," by heartily serving God and man; and if you are "great" in gifts or in repute, humble yourselves to lowly services, and use your gifts to help the weak and little.

Another of these traditional sayings connects itself with the Gospel of St. Luke. In that Gospel we read (chap. vi. 1-4) that, as Jesus and his disciples went through the corn-fields on a certain Sabbath, the Twelve plucked ears of corn, rubbed out the kernels, and ate them. To this the Pharisees took objection, as a violation of the Sabbath law. Jesus answers their objection by citing the example of David, how he, when on the service of God, went into the tabernacle on the Sabbath, and ate the shewbread, which "it was not lawful for him to eat." To this answer the ancient MS. to which we owe the previous saying, adds that, "*On the same day He (Jesus) saw a certain man working on the Sabbath, and said to him, Blessed art thou, O man, if indeed thou knowest what thou doest; but cursed art thou*

if thou knowest not, and a transgressor of the law." Here, again, we have the record of a fact which probably transpired, of words which probably proceeded out of our Lord's mouth. And, assuming it to be an accurate account, it is easy to see how naturally it falls in with the story told by St. Luke. Jesus led his disciples through the fields, as also He wrought many of his miracles, on the Hebrew Sabbath, in order to rebuke the rigid, formal, hypocritical sabbatarianism of the Jews; in order to teach them that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And if, while making his protest against their formalism, He saw a man making the same protest, "working on the Sabbath," to shew that he also refused to be bound by law when God had made him free, it was surely natural that Christ should recognise a fellow-labourer in the cause of truth. On the other hand, the man may have been very far from claiming spiritual freedom or protesting against the current bondage to formalism; he may have been working on the Sabbath only out of greed, or self-will, or irreligion: and in that case, was it not natural that Christ should rebuke his transgression? Suppose the man to have known what he was doing, and he was doing a good work, and would be "blessed" in his deed. Suppose him not to have known, to have meant no protest against the rigid letterism of the Pharisees, and he was doing an evil work, and provoking the curse as "a transgressor of the law."

Here, then, are nine of the traditional sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by far the weightiest of those which are thought to have been uttered by Him. Here are a few out of the multitude of words which could not be written in the Gospels, lest the books should grow so big that the world itself could not hold them. And what are they worth? In one sense they are of the greatest value; in another sense they are of no value at all. They are of the greatest value

to us, since we would not willingly let any word of Christ die—since every saying of his must contain a rich wisdom from which we may enlarge our wealth. They are of no value at all in this sense—that they add nothing essential to the Gospel story. They do not supply any new truth, they simply repeat and illustrate old truths. They do not enlarge, they simply confirm, our conceptions both of the Divine Speaker and of the words which proceeded out of his mouth. Curious and valuable as they are, and dear to the Christian heart for the sake of Him who uttered them, the Gospel of our salvation is complete without them. It teaches the very truths they teach in other and more perfect forms, and gives us all we need to know in order that we may be established in the truth and grace of Christ Jesus the Lord.

II. Although no such saying is recorded in the Gospels, St. Paul tells us that the Lord Jesus used to say, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And this, like other sayings which tradition ascribes to Him, is quite in the heavenly manner. It would not task our faith to believe that Jesus spake these words, even though we did not receive them on the authority of an inspired apostle. They ring true. They are of the heavenly mint. “Good money-changers” would be in no danger of refusing them. The words contain just one of those axioms of Divine wisdom which were frequent on the lips of Christ—one of those pregnant maxims which, if it cross our surface impression, is found to be in perfect accord with our deeper thoughts.

It is better, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” This is the Divine truth concerning giving and receiving; but it is by no means a self-evident truth to some minds. All men are not good money-changers; the rules of the heavenly exchange are not familiar to them: they think “giving” very

poor thrift, and "receiving" the true blessedness. If you take this Divine maxim to a man whose heart is in his purse, he will be apt to reply, "That is your rule, is it? Well, try it on with me. You give, and I'll take ; and let us see who gets tired first." And, no doubt, he will wag his head, and think himself monstrous shrewd as he laughs over his wit and your anticipated discomfiture. But talk with him for a few minutes, and, if he will listen, you need not despair of converting even him to your point of view ; for if the maxim sound romantic, too refined for human nature's daily use, nevertheless it *is* in daily use, and commends itself to common sense no less than to intelligence and piety. Get him to think, and the most prosaic grasping soul alive will soon admit that it is at least more *agreeable* to give than to receive. The giver, at least for the moment and so far as the matter in hand is concerned, takes a higher position than the receiver. Out of his penury, or out of his abundance, he confers a boon, bestows a favour, rivets an obligation. The receiver is bound, by the courtesies of social custom, to feel grateful to him, or to feign a gratitude he does not feel. Hence it comes to pass that to receive a gift gracefully is so much more difficult than to confer one ; to do a kindness so much easier than to accept it. Even children are sensitive to the difference between giving and receiving. Fond as they are of getting presents and "tips," they are still fonder of saving up their pence and exhausting their ingenuity in devising liberal things, in choosing or making some gift, ridiculously useless for the most part, to those whom they love. There are few prettier sights than to see a little child, its face all blushes and smiles, bring its tiny offering to father or mother on some birthday festival ; there are few more healthy emotions than the pride and glee with which the little one sees its gift duly received and admired. Its heart swells with a gladness far sweeter and nobler than the

frank joy with which it pounces on any gift you may bestow upon it, although that also is very pleasant to see. And among men the same rule holds. Point our friend of the purse to a man with the soul of a pauper, living all his days off the alms-basket, creeping and cringing through life with open supplicating palm, his eyes glittering with ravenous hunger for good things he has neither courage to seize nor energy to earn, and ask him whether *that* man answers to his ideal? whether *that* is the life he would choose for himself? or whether, having earned a competence or a fortune by sagacious industry, he would rather be known as a benefactor than a beggar, as helping on the best interests of the town in which he lives, and raising many a poor down-trodden soul from the dust? Our friend need not be a Christian, he need only have the soul of a man in him, to confess that "it is better to give than to receive."

But the Lord Jesus used to say, not simply, "It is better," but "It is *more blessed* to give than to receive;" that is, it is more Divine, more God-like. God, who receives so little, gives all. The very utmost we can do for Him is to return Him his own again with usury. He fills his eternal year with an incessant bounty. The very law of his life is self-impartation, self-sacrifice. Else why did He create earth and man? He is sufficient to Himself. Our goodness extendeth not to Him. Dwelling in the perfect ineffable delights of his single yet manifold being, He had no need of us or of anything that we can do—no need except the need of infinite love. To surround Himself with creatures to whom He could give of his own life, whom He could train through sun and shadow, sorrow and joy, to enter into his rest; by labours and sacrifices which transcend our thought to make them partakers of his Divine nature and eternal peace; to give, and give, and always give; to crowd earth and time, heaven and eternity, with his good gifts; and, all

gifts in one, to bestow Himself upon us—this has been the work of God, this *his* commentary on the words, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

This blessedness He invites us to share. The Gospels convey his invitation in many forms. They tell us of Him who causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall on the evil and unthankful, as well as on the good and just; and they bid us be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. As the main object which the Gospels set before us is the cross on which the Son of God sacrificed Himself for us men and our salvation, so their chief and most urgent command is, “Deny thyself; take up thy cross, and follow me.” The man bending beneath the cross, and finding in his burden a joy which transcends all sensuous delights—this is the symbol at once of the life of Christ and of the Christian life.

The symbol is true to experience. All who have borne the cross are forced to avow that they have never known a joy so divine, a peace so quick with energy and hope, as when they have denied themselves to do good to men. It does not matter at what stage of experience we take them; in every stage they find that self-sacrifice is the road to blessedness. Whether they have only subdued the cravings of fleshly appetite in order to walk after the spirit, or have also put away opportunities of wealth and distinction in order to serve God with tongue or pen: whether they have run counter to their natural bent, giving up pursuits in which they took delight, to devote themselves to studies which would render them better able to serve their generation according to the will of God; or whether they have denied the purest affections of the heart, giving up the sacred delights of home that they might be more efficient ministers of the Word: whether the cross has been laid on sense or ambition, on intellect or affection, they have with

one voice confessed that "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" that, repugnant as it is to flesh and blood, self-sacrifice is after all the true, the supreme, law of life, the law in obedience to which alone man is made one with God.

Who has not found that the cross, patiently borne, sheds sweet and healthful balms into the soul? Did you ever give half your meal to a starving beggar; or sit up, when you sorely needed rest, with a sick neighbour; or subdue the repugnance of a delicate nature and culture to go into some vile haunt with help for body and soul; did you ever really strain your purse-strings till they well-nigh snapped in order to render efficient aid to some good enterprise: in short, have you ever really denied yourself in order to do any good, without having your heart suffused with a glow of satisfaction such as your daintiest pleasure never yielded you, without feeling that for the time you had risen into both a manlier and a diviner life than that you commonly lead? At other times, indeed, you may close your eyes on the truth; in your longing for pleasures sweet to physical or social appetite, you may live by another law; but in your hearts you *know*, and know beyond all doubt, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

There is yet another meaning in this saying. "It is more blessed to give than to receive"—that is, Giving carries the greater blessing with it. "To give to the poor," whether the gift be of money or thought, sympathy or help, truth or life, "is to lend to the Lord." And God is a good paymaster. He is never much or long in our debt; He repays all sacrifices made for Him "a hundredfold, now in this present time." Giving, we get, and spending, thrive.

But let us distinguish between things which differ, lest we indulge a false hope or sink into a false despair. If we give up sensual enjoyments for God, God will not repay us.

with sensual enjoyments, but with greater independence of them. If we give away money in his service, He may not pay us back in money, nor in money's worth. If we give up a night's rest to comfort a sick neighbour, God will not miraculously impart the rest we have lost, and make us feel as strong as though we had kept our bed, though He will repay us with a sweeter and profounder rest.

It is very difficult, I admit, for those who have not entered into these experiences to accredit them. The sacrifices God asks them to make seem substantial enough, and the rewards He offers not a little shadowy and uncertain. Yet surely even these may see, if they will, that appearances are very illusory and misleading. *Which* do you call substantial, that which lasts for a few hours or a few years, or that which endures for ever? Which is doubtful and evanescent, the pleasures that tickle the senses which perish, or the joy and peace which sweeten and enlarge the immortal soul? Nay, even though we shut out the future from our thoughts and look only to the present, we shall still find that the gifts of God are better than the pleasures of the world, if only we keep *the whole man* in mind and his true nature. The radical mistake made by those who live to the flesh is, that they conceive of man as an animal rather than as an intelligent spirit, and therefore suppose that the whole round of his rewards and punishments may be summed up under the terms "pleasure" and "pain." But the fact is that in the complex being of man the spiritual is far more and higher than the animal, and the terms "pleasure" and "pain" are very far from covering his motives to this course of action or that. For the true man, "pleasure" is not by any means the best thing, nor "pain" the worst and most dreadful. "Duty," and the satisfactions which wait on duty, are infinitely before either. Many a man, to discharge his duty or advance his

cause, has cheerfully encountered the most terrible forms of pain, or foregone the most alluring incentives of pleasure. And these are precisely the men whom we all acclaim, while the poltroon who shrinks from duty, because it is difficult or perilous, is every man's scorn. The fact is, as we all feel, that the satisfaction which comes of doing right in scorn of consequence is infinitely sweeter and profounder than any mere pleasure; and that the shame and degradation which spring from doing what we know to be wrong are infinitely more dreadful than pain, though they include pain. And, therefore, God the Giver rewards us when we suffer pain for Him, not with a corresponding pleasure, but with that inward peace and blessedness which, as we have seen, are of so much greater and more enduring worth. We *have* "the hundredfold," even though we never regain the money, or the pleasure, or the social position, or the scholastic fame, or the domestic happiness which we have given up for Him; for *to be* is infinitely better than *to have*, to be good, than to have good things; and every sacrifice we heartily make for Him makes us more like the All-Good. We *have* "the hundredfold," though and because the earthly coin we expend in his service be repaid in heavenly coin, and for any pleasure resigned we have the peace which passeth all understanding, and for any sacrifice endured the blessedness of being "satisfied with his likeness."

Only thus, indeed, does our hope of reward become unselfish. For to sacrifice present good in hope of getting a corresponding but larger and more abiding good some day, although it may be very prudent, is not self-sacrificing. It is simply to seek the largest amount of self-indulgence which is open to us. But to sacrifice a present good in order that we may become like God, what is that but to sacrifice a present good in order that we may gain a larger power of

self-sacrifice, and find a deeper joy in using it? To have all our faculties developed, all our affections raised and purified, and to employ them all in His service whom we love—this, after all, is the truest reward, the loftiest and most complete. And this is the reward that comes to us, not when we are seeking gain or craving reward, but when we are content to do good, hoping for nothing again.

The River of Peace runs hard by the Path of Duty ; but we shall never find the sweet cool waters while we look for them alone ; we shall come on them when we least expect it, and while all our care is to keep the path. But then, when once we walk beside the still waters, beneath a bright and open heaven, then, most of all, we shall enter into the profound satisfactions of a divine service, and feel through every fibre of the soul that, as the Lord Jesus used to say, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

XXIX.

Power on the Woman's Head because of the Angels.

I CORINTHIANS XI. 10.

HARDLY anything is more obvious and notable in St. Paul than his impatience of mere maxims and rules of conduct. He can never rest in them till he has based them on large general principles which cover a multitude of facts, and which may be freely applied under all changes of circumstance and condition. When, therefore, we find him laying down rules about dress, about the dress becoming in men and women, and especially on the modes of dress proper for worship, we might at first think we had caught him departing from one of his most constant habits of thought, busying himself about mere maxims of conduct instead of handling principles and general laws. As, however, we study what he has to say on this theme, we soon discover that his rules are based on principles broad as human life and history, that he gives rules only to establish and illustrate principles which he held to be of imperative and universal obligation.

The Corinthians, and especially those who said, "We are of Paul"—the advanced and progressive party in the Church—boasted that they "remembered him in all things," and held fast to "the traditions" which he had received of the Lord and handed down to them. The Apostle, while

he praises them for their general fidelity, points out that at least in some respects they did not make good their boast, that they had either misconceived or abused the rules and principles which he had laid down. In the eleventh Chapter of his first Epistle he takes exception (1) to the way in which the Corinthian women sinned against the honour and decorum of their sex in asserting their Christian freedom; and (2) to the abuse of the Lord's Supper on the part of both men and women, especially, one hopes, on that of the men.

For the present we have only to consider the first of these charges. The offence of the women was this. Paul had taught them that in Christ Jesus all national, social, sexual distinctions disappeared: "In Him is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female." Certain Christian women laid eager hands on this principle, and so mishandled it as to occasion a public scandal. Paul had taught the spiritual equality of man and woman; he had also taught the social subordination of the woman to the man. But these eager converts had not minds large enough to hold and reconcile both these great principles: they seized impetuously on that which fell in with their wishes, and let the other go—a fault in reasoning of which women are *said* to be guilty to this very day. And indeed I suppose there are men as well as women who find it difficult to reconcile St. Paul's two principles, who are disposed to object, "If in spiritual nature, relation, responsibility, women are on an equality with men, how can they be subordinate to them?" To any such objectors it might be enough to reply: "Christ is the co-equal Son of the Father, the 'fellow' of the Lord of Hosts; yet in the complex mysterious relations of the Blessed Trinity Christ is the subordinate and dependent Son:" for here is an admitted case in which equality of nature and subordinate position co-

exist. But the fuller and more satisfactory reply would be: "In spiritual nature and relation women are the equals of men: but in the divine economy of social life they are subordinate and dependent." What then? in a subordinate position they may shew an equal, even a superior, ability. A designer in a factory, or a governess in a family, or a manager in a bank, or a cook in a kitchen, may have a wider capacity and display higher gifts than their social or official superiors. But how do they prove their equality or their superiority? Not by rebelling against their position, but by accepting it and excelling in it. So with woman. She proves her equality with man, not by rebelling against her subordinate position in the social order, but by cheerfully accepting it as God's ordinance for her, and by discharging its duties with an ability equal or superior to that shewn by her husband in his different sphere.

The Corinthian women, or some of them, did not see that. They thought to assert the equality of the sexes by thrusting themselves into the habits and duties of the masculine sex to the neglect of their own, by praying and prophesying in church instead of ruling their households. As a sign of their enfranchisement from the degrading bonds of heathenism, as a proof that they were the equals of men, they appeared in public unveiled, and so violated the decorum of their sex as then understood: in short, they became bad as women that they might prove themselves as good as men. The honour of the Christian community was at stake. Only women convicted of adultery had their hair shorn; only women of notoriously abandoned life dispensed with a veil. The Greek women, the honourable women, invariably put on a veil, or drew their *peplum* or shawl over head and face when they left their homes. The heathen were quick to misconceive any departure from custom, any innovation on rule on the part of the Church. For many

years they believed the most horrible misrepresentations of the simple innocent "love-feasts" of the primitive Church,—talked of infants murdered to supply the tables, and of vicious indulgences resembling those of the Corinthian temples or the sacred groves. And had the Christian women gone unveiled, when the absence of the veil was the open stamp of harlotry, we can easily conceive what their neighbours would have thought of them, what a fatal obstacle would have been thrown in the path of the infant Church.

It was no mere question of maxims and rules, therefore, with which St. Paul had to deal ; it was a question of principle—of principles vital and profound. And hence it is that he argues so gravely and weightily on what might seem a matter of small moment. Hence he appeals to Nature, to Scripture, to Christian Doctrine, for arguments on points which seem so trivial as whether a man should or should not have his hair cut, whether a woman should or should not wear a veil. His reasoning is here and there very difficult to follow, partly because it is so close and compressed, and partly no doubt because it contains allusions familiar to his readers, but which we can hardly catch.

I. Take the simplest of his arguments—his appeal to Nature. "Judge for yourselves. Is it seemly that a woman pray to God uncovered? Doth not even Nature itself teach you that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame to him ; but that, if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her? for her hair is given her for a covering" (vers. 13-15). That is to say, man is by Nature unveiled, has short hair ; woman is veiled with her long hair. The Divine intention is thus revealed. In handling and attiring the body we are to take the suggestions of Nature as ordinances of God ; we are to carry out the Divine intentions indicated by our physical

structure: man is to go unveiled; woman is to use, or to imitate, the natural veil which God has given her. The Greeks and Romans did thus interpret and obey the voice of Nature. Among them, as we learn from their satirists, it was the climax of profligate effeminacy for a young man to wear long hair, to bind up his thick tresses with a golden fillet. And to this day nothing is more conspicuous in the busts of ancient classical art than the close-cropped skulls of the Greek athletes and the Roman emperors; in the case of the emperors, indeed, one is often tempted to wish that they had worn more hair, if only to soften the square, massive, brutal features they often display. But while their noblest men cut their hair close and short, in common with men of all ages, they held long flowing tresses as among the most potent charms of women—as a real “power” on their heads. Nature did not speak to them in vain. And therefore the Apostle, writing to the Greeks and Romans of Corinth, might well appeal to what “Nature itself” had taught them.

The fact that St. Paul appeals to Nature as an authority deserves more than a passing remark, though we cannot give it more now. From how many evils would the Church have been saved had his example been followed? She has too commonly demanded that we should break with the fair natural world around us, and crush down the native instincts of the heart. And hence have sprung at least half the errors of dogma and practice which have impeded her progress. Nature does not teach asceticism, celibacy, or gloomy views whether of the present or the future life. *She* does not say, “Touch not, taste not, handle not.” Had we listened to her, had we asked with St. Paul, “What does Nature itself teach?” we should have had more of his free, generous, catholic spirit.

II. St. Paul appeals to the Scriptures. His appeal is to

the verses in Genesis* which describe the creation of man and woman, and the relation in which they were appointed to stand. "A man ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is an image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. For man is not of woman, but woman of man : and man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man" (vers. 7-9). Man, said Moses, was made "in the image of God ;" therefore, adds St. Paul, man is a "glory" of God. Hence he ought not to veil the head which bears an impress so divine, the face which reflects so excellent a glory. But "the woman is the glory of the man ;" she was taken out of his side—not from the rude clay, but from clay already attempered by human life and heat ; not from any remote or uncomely member of man's body, but from his very heart, from the very seat of life. Therefore she is his "glory ;" she represents what is finest in him and most exquisite, what is highest and best. Nevertheless, the Apostle insists (ver. 8) she was taken from man, not man from woman ; she was (ver. 9) created for man, not he for her. And this derived origin indicates her dependent condition. Although she is his glory, because she is his glory, she is to defer and minister to him from whom she sprang, just as the highest spirits are those who serve most and best.

"*And therefore,*" continues the Apostle (ver. 10), "*ought the woman to have power on her head, because of the angels.*" No verse in the New Testament is, I suppose, more perplexing than this. Volumes have been written on it. I need not dwell on the various interpretations put upon it. The ablest Commentators understand it thus : "Because woman is subordinate and dependent on man, she ought to wear a veil on her head to denote her subjection to man." That is to say, when the Apostle affirmed,

* Gen. i. 26 ; ii. 18, 21.

"The woman ought to have *power* on her head," he meant she ought to have *subjection*—ought to have not a power of her own, but a symbol of her husband's power over her! By such a method of interpretation we may make the Apostle say anything, even the opposite of what he means. We can accept neither the method nor its results. But, if we reject this interpretation, where shall we find another? If this method is not good, what method shall we adopt?

Let me offer a suggestion on that point. When we are puzzled by a word or phrase in the Apostle's writings, we are too apt, I fear, to make it a mere question of words—to forget how habitually he had great fixed thoughts in his mind, and alluded to them even when he did not give them clear expression. Now one of his great fixed thoughts is, that we rule by serving, that to become great we must make ourselves of the least, that to rise we must stoop, that the lord of all is the servant and minister of all. You instantly recognise that as one of St. Paul's habitual thoughts. Possibly he alludes to it here. He has been describing the subordinate position of woman. She is the dependent helpmeet, or minister, of man. But if she is to serve, she must be strong. The minister of man must have "power" on her head. To the Hebrews unshorn hair, like that of Samson, was the sign of strength or power. And the unshorn hair of the woman is "the power," or the symbol of the power, which her service requires. This I take to be the Apostle's thought. And does not Nature itself confirm his thought? Is not a woman's hair a strength to her as well as a glory? How often has a thread of golden hair drawn strong men across the world! How often have soft locks and bright meshes proved stronger bonds than bars of steel! Who does not remember the little packet, all blotted with tears, which they found in a corner of poor Swift's desk, with these words on it, "Only a woman's hair?"—words than

which few are more pathetic, words heavy with the sadness of a fierce passion, and a fierce conflict with passion, long since past. This, then, I think, is "the power" which the woman has, and ought to have, on her head,—the power of unshorn hair, the power of the soft flowing tresses with which Nature has veiled and adorned her head.

But what are we to make of "the angels," for whose sake woman is not to put off this power? The received opinion is, "that angels attend our Christian assemblies, and that, as they love to see all things done decently and in order, men and women should scrupulously observe the decorums of their sex." Let those who can be content with this explanation, take it; they are very welcome to it. But who can be content with it? What thoughtful man does not pronounce it tame, inapplicable, inadmissible? St. Paul has taught us to look for deeper meanings than this in his mysterious words. And if we study his words, and the connections of his thought, we soon get a clue to a meaning very Oriental and mystical in its tone, and therefore all the more likely to be his.

If you examine verses 7-9, you will see that St. Paul quotes or refers to three passages* in the Book of Genesis, in which the original relation of the sexes is set forth. Closely following the passages he cites, there is, in the Book of Genesis, a curious story of the first infraction of the true relation of the sexes. "It came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all whose beauty charmed them."† We know, or think we know, what that story means; that it means the inter-marriage of the pious race with the impious, of the sons of Seth with the daughters of Cain; and the introduction of

* Gen. i. 20; ii. 18, 23; and iii. 16

† Gen. vi. 1-4.

polygamy, since the men of Seth's line now first took as many women as charmed them for their wives. But on this simple historical basis the Rabbis built up a great pile of fables. With them "the sons of God" were the angels, not the sons of pious Seth. The daughters of men, departing from their primitive simplicity and decorum, laid aside their veils, and tricked out their hair and faces with ornaments. The angels saw them, and grew enamoured of their beauty, and fell from their pure unimpassioned blessedness. This, according to Hebrew legend, is "the fall of the angels;" and to this fall both St. Peter and St. Jude refer in their Epistles, adopting the legend which no man then doubted. Possibly, probably, St. Paul also alludes to it here. The Corinthian women, hidden by their veils of hair, or going abroad with covered heads, could bring no such evil to the angels as, according to the Hebrew legend, had been brought to them by the unveiled faces of the women before the flood. If only "because of the angels," therefore, they should carry this veil, this power, this strength of flowing tresses on their heads.

While this legend is at all strange to us, we may find it hard to believe that St. Paul here alludes to it. But we have to remember that it was part of the national faith, that every Jew believed it; we have to remember that two other Apostles refer to it without branding it as untrue, rather implying, indeed, that they accepted it as true; we have to remember that St. Paul is quoting in the previous verses from the Book of Genesis, quoting God's institute of marriage, and his ordinance on the original and true relation of the sexes. When once we remember these things, we shall at least admit it to be likely that he had this story of the first violation of the sexual relation in his mind, and the Jewish legend which grew out of it. Indeed, the more we dwell on it, the more probable it appears, that he had this legend in view

when he bade women cover their heads because of the angels. For St. Paul was a Rabbi as well as an Apostle. And the Rabbis were so possessed by this legend that they were constantly making proverbs about it. Thus, for example, Rabbi Simeon used to say, "If a woman's head be uncovered, evil angels come and sit upon it." Nay, the legend passed current through the whole East. The "fathers" of the Church believed it. The Arabs and Turks believe it to this day. They tell us this story about Mahommed and his wife Khadijah at the time when he began to see visions and dream dreams :—"Khadijah said to Mahommed after his first vision, 'If the angel appear again, let me know.' Gabriel appeared to him again. He said to her, 'I see him.' His wife placed his head first on her left, then on her right shoulder, and asked, 'Seest thou him still?' He answered, 'Yea.' Then she said, 'Turn, and lie on my bosom ;' which when he had done, she asked again, 'Seest thou him?' He answered, 'Yea.' Then she took her veil from her head, and asked, 'Seest thou him still?' And this time he answered, 'Nay.' Then she said, 'By heaven, it is true, it is true ! It was an angel, and not a devil !'" Having told this story, the Arabian historian remarks and explains, "Khadijah knew that a good angel must fly before the face of an *unveiled woman*, whilst a devil would bear the sight very well."

So that, at least in Oriental thought, there is a power on the head of a woman to which even angels are susceptible ; and it may very well be that St. Paul availed himself of this antique tradition, this universal belief, when he bade women observe the decorum of their sex, and keep the power on their heads because of the angels.

III. St. Paul appeals to Christian Doctrine. "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God" (ver. 3). Here is a

recognized Christian principle—Christ the head of man, as God is the head of Christ; and from this principle St. Paul draws the inference that just as Christ is the head of man, so man is the head of the woman. Is the inference a sound inference? Is not Christ just as truly the head of the woman as of the man? Is there any pretext even for supposing women to be farther from Christ than men? Assuredly not. In their personal relation to Him, viewed simply as separate souls, as distinct human beings, there is no difference between them; women are as near Christ as men; He is their Head, since He is the Head of the whole Church, the whole human race. In Him is neither male nor female. He is not of an age, but for all time; not for a race or a sex, but for all; all womanly as well as all manly excellences combine in Him. Viewed simply as human beings, the relation of women to Christ is as direct, vital, immediate as that of men.

But, now, look at them not simply as human beings, as individual souls, but as souls incarnated in flesh, as forming a distinct sex, as members of the social order. In that order there must be grades, degrees, subordinations, or there can be no whole, no unity. In an empire there must be a ruling race, or class, or person: there must be governing members in a society: and in a household there must be a superior or ruling sex. When we ask, Which sex is to rule? the Bible replies, "Man is first in creation, first in dignity. Woman was made for him, not he for her." And with this natural order and subordination, the equal spiritual relation to Christ is not to interfere. Christ did not come to thwart or to reverse, but to perfect, human nature and human society. In Him indeed is neither Greek nor Jew, neither male nor female: you cannot so much as conceive of Him as asking, "Is that the prayer of an Englishman or a German, of a man or a woman?" before He will listen to it. In Him all these national and sexual distinctions are nothing. But, out of

Him, in their relation not to Him but to each other, there are still different races and sexes : all may be Christian, but the Englishman remains an Englishman, the German a German, the man a man, the woman a woman. The social order and the prosperity of the world hang on our recognition of these distinctions, on the fair discharge of the special duties they involve.

What grade we hold in this social order, and what part we play, is not by any means the main question ; but how we fill it, how we play it. The woman, for instance, though equal in nature, holds the subordinate social grade ; but if she play her part well, shew herself perfect in it, become "pure womanly," is she not nobler than an unmanly man ? and as noble, as high in the favour of God and Christ, as the manliest of men ? She becomes perfect as a woman when she cheerfully accepts her position, her part ; when she ministers to man, not only from love to him, but also from love to Christ.

Suppose a woman, a wife, to rebel against her social position and the divine ordinance which assigned it to her. If she push her mutiny to the extreme, what happens ? One of two things. Either, casting off all restraint, she breaks the tie which bound her to her husband, divorces herself from him rather than obey him ; or she openly rules where she ought to obey, and is condemned by her own instincts and her own sex even more severely than by men. But suppose she cheerfully accepts her part, fills it in the true womanly spirit—what then ? Why then she has her own approval, and in the judgment of men as well as of women her function is every whit as high and noble as that of her husband. Suppose, again, she takes and fills her part in a Christian spirit, does all for Christ's sake ; and then every act of womanly duty and wifely service becomes religious ? her happiness rises into blessedness, her freedom into a holy and royal freedom.

To these general principles St. Paul gives a peculiarly Oriental and symbolic expression. His main principle is, that in the social order man's is the higher, woman's the subordinate, position. This principle he sets forth under the symbol of headship. Woman looks up to man as the next highest, man looks up to Christ; man is woman's head; Christ is man's head. Thus the human head becomes the symbol of Christian verities. Because it is a symbol of sacred verities, a certain sanctity attaches to it; because it is a type or emblem, it is to be treated with a certain reverence, the reverence we shew to all other emblems and symbols of Christian truth. For a man to dishonour his head is to dishonour Christ, since his head is a symbol of Christ; for a woman to dishonour her head is to dishonour man, because her head is the symbol of man.

This is St. Paul's argument. To us it may seem fanciful and far-fetched. But we have to remember that it was not addressed to us, but to a church in which these fanciful Orientalisms had great power. Yet even we may feel the force of it, if we think how much the value of our Christian Sacraments depends on our preserving the simplicity of their emblems. The water, bread, wine of these Sacraments have a certain holiness in our thoughts. Did it ever strike you that, merely by corrupting their simplicity, we might almost destroy the power of the ordinances? If, for example, some wealthy and luxurious church, instead of plain bread and wine, were to put rich plum-cake and a wine highly spiced or mulled on the table of the Lord, do you not instinctively feel that, with the simplicity of the symbols, much of the sacredness and force of the Sacrament would be lost? Some persons, again, find it pleasant and refreshing to put a little eau-de-cologne in the water with which they wash their face and hands; but if some squeamish person were to have a few flasks emptied into Font or Baptistry, would you not in-

stinctively feel that thus to tamper with the simplicity of the symbol was to impair the value of the ordinance? And it is thus that St. Paul argues about the human head. "The head of the man is the symbol of Christ's headship; the head of the woman is the symbol of man's headship. So long as they are left in their natural simplicity, there is a sacramental holiness in these symbols: so soon as that simplicity is corrupted, so soon as men and women begin to play fantastic tricks with their hair, the value of the symbol declines. If you would honour God, leave them as He made them. He has given men short hair; to women He has given the tresses which in part conceal the head they adorn. Do not tamper with the simplicity of Nature, nor obscure the Divine intention indicated by your physical structure. Let the women worship with covered heads, the men with open uncovered face. God *meant* the woman's head to be veiled, or why did He veil it with hair? God *meant* the man's head to be uncovered, or why did He withhold that natural veil from him?"

This is St. Paul's argument, but not quite the whole of it. There is still one point to be noted. Before we can fully reach his sense of the sacredness of "the head," we must remember why the Jews and most Oriental nations, covered the head when they worshipped. Then, as now, the pious Hebrew not only retained hat or turban when he entered the sanctuary, but also drew over it the *tallith*, a sacred veil, kept exclusively for public worship. By veiling his head during worship, he meant to express reverence for the Divine Presence—that he was not worthy to stand in it, that he could not look on God and live. If pure angels cover their faces with their wings, how much more should sinful man cover his head with a veil?

From the Jew's point of view, therefore, the assumption of the *tallith* was a reverential and religious act. But not from

St. Paul's. In his scheme of thought, Christ was the head of man. For a man to cover his head in worship was therefore to veil Christ; it was to imply that He was not worthy to stand in the Divine Presence, or to gaze on the Divine Holiness. Man must not dishonour Christ, his head: let him therefore pray or prophesy with head uncovered, if only to denote that Christ need not veil his face, that He could look on God and live. But the very reason which made it right for man, made it wrong for woman, to worship unveiled. For, according to St. Paul, her head was the man. And to uncover her head in worship was to imply that man needed no veil when he came before God, that he could stand unabashed before the Divine Presence and Holiness! Let her worship, therefore, with head studiously veiled, and thus bear witness to the fact that sinful man was unworthy so much as to lift up his eyes unto heaven.

We have now, I believe, the whole of St. Paul's argument before us. Is it not curious, wonderful? Does it not quicken a new sense of admiration in us that he should handle even so slight a matter as the use of the veil so largely, with so wide a sweep of argument? If it be a true mark of greatness that it handles all things greatly, how great must he be who, in teaching women to worship with covered heads, appeals to the laws of Nature, to the revelations of Holy Writ, to the verities and mysteries of the Christian Faith?

Let us imitate Paul as well as admire him. The great lesson he teaches in this passage, the great example he sets, is that we should apply the laws and principles which God has revealed in Nature, in Scripture, in Christ, to every phase and department of our life, to every detail of conduct, even the most trivial and common. A man asks, "Shall I have my hair cut?" "Yes," replies St. Paul, "for Nature itself teaches you that it is a shame for a man to have long hair: Scripture teaches you that man is an image and glory

of God : Christ teaches you that He is the head of man, and neither God nor Christ requires a veil." "Shall I wear a veil?" asks a woman. And Paul replies, "Yes, for Nature itself teaches you that it is the glory of woman to have long hair : Scripture teaches you that the woman was made for the man : Christ teaches you man is the head of the woman, and man needs a veil so often as he enters the Divine Presence." If the large laws of Nature and God are to be applied to questions so small as these, to what questions are they inapplicable? If we ask, Shall I eat? shall I drink? shall I take daily exercise? shall I attend public worship? shall I take a cordial part in the work and service of the Church? shall I wear a kind face, and speak kind words to my neighbour, and help him in his need?—if we ask any such questions as these, are not Nature, Scripture, Christ ready with a reply? If we are sincere, and bent on knowing what the will of God is, have we any great difficulty in discovering their reply? Do we not know and feel both that God does respond to every such question we ask, and that the true happiness, the true blessedness of life consists in thus bringing all we do under law to God?

Let us learn from St. Paul to apply the largest and deepest principles to the smallest details of conduct and duty; but let us also learn to apply them with his freedom. Nothing would be more fatal to our spiritual health than to stereotype the rules he inferred from the laws of Nature and God, to turn his principles, or his applications of them, into binding and universal maxims of conduct. To the Greek and Roman men and women of Corinth he said, "Let the men cut their hair and worship with uncovered face; let the women veil their faces and not speak in church." Are we invariably to adopt and enforce these rules? Is a woman never to speak in public, and always to wear a veil? Is it wrong for a man in India, or at an outdoor service, to worship with

covered head, to keep on his hat or turban? To make St. Paul's rules inflexible and universal would be to sin against his spirit. On Greeks and Romans he enforced attention to the customs and decorums of their race and time, and gave them perfectly good reasons for adhering to them. Had he been writing to the free women of Germany or of the West, who did not wear a veil, or to Jews who worshipped with covered heads, no doubt he would have urged them to observe their honourable customs, and have found reasons for it equally cogent and excellent. Principles abide, but customs change. And we then act most in the spirit of Paul when we freely apply his principles to our changed customs. Always and everywhere he would have the woman honour and obey the man, the man love and cherish the woman, for Christ's sake, and not merely from natural affection. Always and everywhere he would have all men honour Christ as the Head of humanity, and grow up into Him in all things. But he would also have us apply these principles for ourselves, and walk by them in our several conditions according to the national and social customs of our age and race. Whether we worship God with naked feet or uncovered head does not matter a jot; save that we should choose the posture or action which our age deems most reverential: what is of supreme importance is that, in whatever forms, we should worship Him, and worship Him in spirit and in truth. Whether the woman honour the man by veiling her face, and the man honour Christ by baring his head, must be determined by the customs of the time: what is of supreme importance is that we should love each other, and that we all, in all we do, should seek to serve and honour Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

St. Paul a Working Man and in Want.

2 CORINTHIANS XI. 9.

WHEN St. Paul was at Corinth, about the very time that he found employment in the workshop of Aquila and Priscilla, a picturesque scene transpired in Rome, which still lives in history, which has a special interest for Englishmen, and to which I may be permitted to refer as it will help to fix the date of my subject in our minds.

A little more than forty years after the birth of Christ, the Roman legions, led by the Emperor Claudius, had effected a landing on the eastern coast of Britain, and gained a decisive victory over our fathers. For nearly ten years, however, Caratacus, our first great hero, maintained a stubborn and gallant conflict against the victorious legions. Driven gradually to the west and north, he made his last stand among the hills of Wales. Here, after a terrible and bloody contest, he was defeated. He fled as far as to Yorkshire, hoping still to renew the war. His hope was turned to shame by the treachery of the Queen of the Brigantes, who put him in chains, and betrayed him into the hands of his enemies. He, with his wife, his daughter, his brothers, and many other of his attached followers, was carried captive to Rome. His fame had preceded him. All Italy was eager to see the brave chieftain who had so long defied the imperial armies. A grand military spectacle was prepared. The Emperor Claudius,

with his consort Agrippina by his side, appeared seated on a lofty tribunal before the gates of the Prætorian camp. The Roman standards waved over his head. The imperial guards stood under arms round the royal seat. The people of Rome hemmed in the pageant with a dense living mass. The slaves and followers of the British chief were first paraded, with the trophies taken in the war. Then followed his wife, and daughter, and brothers, bewailing their hard fate with tears and cries that won no pity. Last of all came Caractacus himself, "pride in his port, defiance in his eye;" his bearing so worthy of his cause and fame as to compel universal admiration. As he passed the throne, he paused, and appealed to the emperor. "Had my moderation," he said, "been equal to my success, I had appeared here as a friend, not as a captive. . . . My present lot redounds as much to your glory as to my shame. I had horses, men, arms, treasures. What wonder if I was bent on keeping them? If you would lord it over all, it does not follow that all would be lorded over by you. Had I yielded without a blow, neither had I won a name, nor you your laurels. Wreak your vengeance on me, and the deed will soon pass into oblivion. Spare my life, and the memorial of your clemency will live for ever."*

The proud appeal was heard with favour: the illustrious captive was spared. He remained in Rome in honourable custody for many years; he was still there when St. Paul visited Rome and became a prisoner in the Prætorian camp.

The two men, each of whom had perilled his life in a great cause, may possibly have met. Some writers are even sanguine enough to believe that they did meet, and that, under Paul's teaching, Caractacus became a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. However that may have been, it is very

* Tacitus, "Annals." xii. 36—38.

certain that while Caractacus was asking for life at Rome, St. Paul was asking for work at Corinth.

Another event had recently transpired at Rome, in which we have some concern. It was mainly by the help of Herod Agrippa that Claudius, the conqueror of Britain, had been raised to the imperial throne. The emperor retained a grateful recognition of the service the Jewish prince had rendered him. In proof of his gratitude, Claudius confirmed Agrippa in his authority as ruler of Galilee, and added to his domain the provinces of Samaria and Judea. He also, for Agrippa's sake, shewed great favour to the Jews, who crowded to Rome and rose to no small influence in the State.

For thirteen years his favour knew no change. Then, however, two causes conspired to alienate him from the Hebrew people. First, the Jews of Judea broke out into revolt against the Roman yoke. Fierce and bloody conflicts occurred between the Jewish zealots and the Roman legions. It was not deemed safe to permit many thousands of a disaffected and hostile race to remain in the imperial city. Hence, as we read in Acts xviii. 2, an edict was passed in which "Claudius commanded all Jews to depart from Rome."

The political disaffection of the Jews was not, however, the only reason for this edict. We get new light upon it from a very unexpected source. Suetonius, the Latin historian, wrote a life of the Emperor Claudius, and in that life there occurs this remarkable phrase: "The Jews who, instigated by Chrestus, were in constant commotion, he (Claudius) banished from Rome."*

Two things are remarkable in this passage. It is *not* remarkable that a heathen historian should call the Lord Jesus *Chrestus*, instead of *Christus*, for *Chrestus*, or "Good," was

* "Judæos, impulsore Chresto, assidue tumultuantes Româ expulit."
—Suet., "Claud.," xxv.

a common name with the Romans, while *Christus*, or "Anointed," was wholly unknown to them; and Suetonius might well make a mistake in a single letter. * And again, he, in common with all Romans of culture, despised the superstitions of the Jews too much to give them a careful examination. The Christians to him were simply a Jewish sect. He gives us his opinion of them.† They were in his eyes "a race of men" who pestered the world "with a novel and malignant superstition;" and therefore we could not expect him to give us an exact account of them. But, nevertheless, it is remarkable that, twenty years after Christ had been put to death by a Roman statesman, a learned Roman historian should suppose Him to be alive and causing commotions in Rome, a city in which He had never set his foot. It is also remarkable that thus early there should be a vigorous Christian Church in Rome. When Suetonius says that "the Jews were banished from Rome because, moved by Christ, they were in constant commotion," he, no doubt, means that the dissensions between Jews and Christians had already risen to such a height as to attract public attention, and appear to threaten the public peace. Yet when the Jews were expelled from Rome scarcely twenty years had elapsed since the death of Christ. St. Paul did not arrive in Rome till ten years after this date. No other apostle had been here. The good seed had sprung up of itself. The great Roman Church was founded we know not how. But for the casual phrase of a heathen historian we should not have known that it was a strong zealous church in the days of the Emperor Claudius—so strong that the rage of the

* Yet it was singular, perhaps, that Suetonius should have fallen into this error, since in his life of Nero he gives the Christian name accurately. See the next note.

† "Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ ac malicæ."—Suet., "Ner.," xvi.

Jews against it bred commotions which were thought to be dangerous to the public weal.

This edict, then, which banished the Jews from Rome, was occasioned both by their political disaffection and their religious disputes. Among the Jews whom it expelled were Aquila and Priscilla, the tent-makers. Banished from Rome, they took refuge in Corinth, where they set up their factory and resumed their traffic. And one day there stood at their door a little man, with weak eyes and of a feeble presence, who said that he too was a Jew and a tent-maker and asked for work.

Now, how came St. Paul to want work at a handicraft? How came he to be able to do it? He was of a good family; he had filled high positions in Church and State. His father, although a Cilician, was a Roman citizen, for Paul was "free born;" and a provincial could become a Roman citizen only by public services, or by purchasing "this freedom with a great sum of money." St. Paul had been to college—sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the most famous teacher of his time. He himself was an ordained and recognised rabbi. The Sanhedrin had employed him in the service of the State. Even when he passed from the Temple to the Church, from persecuting to serving Christ, he was at once raised to the ministry and apostleship, and came not a whit behind the chiefest of the apostles. How should such an one have learned to work with his hands? how should he need to work with them?

The answer to that question reminds us of a great distinction between the Oriental and Western races. We of Europe hold that no man can be a gentleman, that no man can take a respectable, and much less a high, position in society, unless he is rich, or, at least, rich enough to be above the necessity of manual labour. We think it no small degradation if a man of rank is reduced to work with his hands. We think it absurd

that a working man should try to enter Parliament, or to take his place among gentlemen, until he has made a fortune ; though then he is good enough for any society or any position. If we ourselves have attained any social standing, or made a little money, we shrink from apprenticing our sons to any handicraft. We would rather send them to starve in an overcrowded profession, or to earn a scanty pittance as clerks, than let them "sink" into working men, although as carpenters or coopers, builders or engine-makers, they might soon earn three times as much as a clerk, and hope, by industry and economy, to become masters and employers. They may work as hard as they like at their sports—at cricket, at boating, at gymnastics ; but directly hard muscular work earns bread or wages, it is voted low, ungenteel, degrading.

This absurd prejudice has never yet found a congenial soil in the East. To this day, for instance, among the Turks, a handicraftsman often rises to offices of state, and now and then to the very highest offices. And even in the Sultan's seraglio, I believe, all the young princes are taught some handicraft, in order that, if misfortunes should befall them, they may have the means of earning their own bread. Among the ancient Eastern races this sensible manly custom was even more prevalent than it is in modern times ; and in no nation was it more strictly observed, or more honoured in the observance, than among the Jews. It was their rule that every young man, whatever his rank or wealth, and though bred for one of the learned professions, should also be taught some handicraft. To teach their sons a craft of this kind was held to be a religious duty. Their rabbis observed and enforced it ; and, so far as we can learn, it was the common and more laborious crafts which they chose. Thus, Rabbi Jose was a tanner ; Rabbi Judas, a baker ; Rabbi Johanan, a shoemaker ; and Maimonides assures us

that some of their wisest and greatest rabbis, the leading statesmen as well as the leading teachers of their time, were "hewers of wood and drawers of water." The Talmud is full of injunctions on this point. It affirms* that one of the first duties of a father to his son is "to teach him a trade"—it even ranks it on a level with "teaching him the law." Rabbi Juda, too, is very bold, and says: "He that teaches not his son a trade, does as though he taught him to be a thief." And the wise Gamaliel used to say—probably St. Paul heard him say: "He that has a craft in his hands, to what is he like?—He is like to a vineyard that is *fenced*." by which he meant, I suppose, that the man's life was defended against the incursions of indolence, sickness, want.

And Rabbi *Saul* had his trade. Mechanical and yet not base, he wrought with his hands at the "art and craft" of tent-making. No doubt, as some of the Commentators, jealous with a Western jealousy for Paul's honour, have pointed out, there were branches of this craft which implied no mean artistic skill. As war was then the main business of life, as the wealthiest and most distinguished men passed their days in "the tented field," tents were often palaces. Julius Cæsar, for instance, travelled with a chest of mosaics, which were laid down to form the pavement of his tent whenever he halted. Many such tessellated pavements are dug up on the sites of ancient Roman camps; and we may be sure that, when the pavements were so costly, the canopies were of a corresponding magnificence. We may be sure too, from the character of the man, that, whatever Paul did, he did well; that, if the chance came in his way, he was quite capable of weaving a sumptuous beautiful tent, fit for the most superb of emperors or the daintiest of princesses.

* "What is commanded of a father towards his son?—To circumcise him, to teach him the law, to teach him a trade."—*Talmud*.

But such chances were not very likely to come to **any** man who worked for Aquila, a fugitive Jew, now at Rome, now at Corinth, now at Ephesus. And still less were they likely to come to a workman like St. Paul, always on the move, always giving even more time and energy to his labours as rabbi and apostle than to the tasks and niceties of his craft. The probability is that, though he could never be quite a common working man, and though he would always **do** his work well, he wrought at the most common branches of his trade, and made the small rude tents which were sold to ordinary travellers—to merchants, pedlars, freebooters, and pilgrims. The hills of Cilicia, his native country, were famous for a breed of goats, which yielded a long tenacious hair very fit for weaving into a stout impervious cloth. This cloth, called “cilicium” from Cilicia, the province in which it was produced, was on sale in all the markets of Asia, and Greece, and Rome. Wherever they went, tent-makers would find a supply of it; and it was this cloth which Paul had to cut and sew into tents, or the outside covering of tents. Hard disagreeable work it was, I make no doubt, and badly paid; for, as we shall see, even so good a workman as Paul, working for so good and friendly a master as Aquila, could not always earn enough to live on.

But why did Paul, now that he was an apostle and had a right to live by the Gospel, waste on mechanical toils time which he was capable of employing to so much better purpose? Well, he did not think the time was wasted; he held his very work to be a preaching and a commendation of the Gospel. Then, as now, the Greeks, and especially the Greeks of the seaboard, were the keenest traders of the time, the most set on gain by all means and at all hazards. And St. Paul feared that if he “lived by the Gospel,” they might suspect him of selfish motives in preaching the Gospel. With what heart could he teach them to love God and their

neighbour, while they suspected that he loved himself more than his neighbours or his God,—that he was trading on his office,—that, instead of seeking their good, he was making gain of them? He would give these keen unscrupulous traders no ground for such a suspicion as that. He would earn his bread with his own hands, and so prove his disinterested love for them, and preach with his hands the very Gospel he spoke with his lips. Hence, no sooner does he leave inland Philippi, and come to Thessalonica, on the sea-coast, than he takes up his old craft, and goes to work as a tent-maker. In after months, in his Epistles to the Thessalonians, he reminds them of his toils, and states the motive of them. In his First Epistle* he says: "We were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for *labouring night and day*, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God." In his Second Epistle† he recurs to the theme, and says: "When we were with you, *this* we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat;" and puts them in remembrance of the example by which he had illustrated the precept: "Neither did *we* eat any man's bread for nought; but *wrought with labour and travail night and day*, that we might not be chargeable to any of you." From Thessalonica Paul came down to Corinth, "the city of the two seas."‡ Here he abode one year and six months. But the very first thing recorded of him§ is, that he "found a certain Jew named Aquila, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome), and came unto them. And because he was of the craft, he abode with them and *wrought*: for by their

* 1 Thess. ii. 8, 9.

† "Bimaris Corinthas."

‡ 2 Thess. iii. 10, 8.

§ Acts xviii. 1—3.

occupation they were tent-makers." In the Epistles he afterwards wrote to the Church at Corinth, he makes perpetual allusion to his labours as a handicraftsman. Unless we have read these Epistles with this feature of St. Paul's life in our minds, we cannot fail to be surprised as we find how large a space it occupies. I need not refer to passing or indirect allusions. It will be enough to take the three passages in which he elaborates the point. In the First Epistle he devotes as much as a whole Chapter to it (the ninth Chapter). He argues that as an apostle he has as great a right to a maintenance "as the other apostles, even the brethren of the Lord and Cephas." He is a soldier : and no soldier is expected to go to a warfare at his own charges. He is a vine-planter : and no man plants a vineyard without eating of the fruit thereof. He is a shepherd : and no man feeds a flock, who does not live on the sale of its milk. He treads out the corn of heaven : is his mouth to be muzzled ? He is a ploughman, a sower, a thresher : is he not to "partake" of the grain ? He is a minister of the altar : is he not to live by the altar ? He is a preacher of the Gospel : and the Lord Himself has ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel. This was his "right," this his "power." Nevertheless, he had foregone this right ; he had not used this power. Rather than use it, he had borne all kinds of toil and privation, lest the Gospel should be "hindered" by any suspicion of his disinterestedness and integrity. What was the reward at which he aimed ? Nothing but this : that "when he preached the Gospel, he might make it without charge" to any ; that he might be "free from all men, in order to become," of his own will, "the slave of all."

This was the reward he *sought*. The reward he *gained* was, that his very disinterestedness became a ground of suspicion. Because he did not use that right to live by the Gospel which the other apostles did use, there were some at Corinth who

denied his claim to be an apostle ; who did not scruple to affirm that he himself doubted his claim, or he would never have foregone his right to a maintenance. It is this argument which he meets in two agitated and pathetic passages of his Second Epistle. He affirms* that he is no whit behind those "*overmuch* apostles" who were seeking to supplant him. With some touch of humorous scorn he apologises for his sin in abasing† himself to the labours of his craft, that he might exalt his hearers and disciples by preaching to them the Gospel of God freely ; for robbing other churches, that he might serve them without wage. He reminds them that when he was with them, he was at times *in want* ; and that, even then, he was not chargeable to them. He affirms that at least in the region of Achaia, of which province Corinth was the capital, no man shall ever rob him of the boast, that in everything he has kept and will keep himself from being burdensome to them. "Wherefore?" he cries ; "because I love you not? God knows it is not that. But because I will never give an occasion to those who boast that they are apostles because they let you support them,—about the only proof of apostleship they can produce. *My* boast shall be that, though I am an apostle, I have taken nothing from you. O foolish Corinthians ! if a man bring you into bondage, if he devour you, if he take from you, if he exalt himself over you, ye honour these false apostles as the very servants of Christ. Will ye not honour one who has abased himself for you, who has given to you, who has wanted rather than take from you, who has been free of you only that he might the better serve you?"

From Corinth St. Paul passed over to Ephesus, on the opposite coast of the Ægean Sea ; and here, save for a flying visit to Judea, he remained three years, "disputing

* 2 Cor. xi. 5-15.

† Compare 2 Cor. xi. 7, with Phil. iv. 12.

and persuading" with the Ephesians "the things concerning the kingdom of God." Here also he toiled at his craft. Writing from Ephesus to the Corinthians, he says: "*Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands.*"* Nay, more: it is during his sojourn at Ephesus that we get our first glimpse of a fact, which was no doubt one of the constant facts of his life—that he supported *others* as well as himself by his manual toils. When he took leave of the Ephesian elders,* when they could hardly catch his farewell for weeping that they should "see his face no more," he bade them remember "that by the space of three years he had warned them day and night with tears, keeping back nothing that was profitable to them, coveting no man's silver or gold, always acting on the maxim of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" "Yea," he says, "ye yourselves know that *these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.*" It is one of the most touching and impressive scenes in a life rich above most in tragic adventures. It is often in our thoughts. As we see the apostle lift those thin strong hands, worn and scarred with constant toil, even we are moved by the appeal. We do not wonder that the elders, who "knew after what manner he had been with them at all seasons," "wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him." Those toil-worn hands speak to us with a still more pathetic eloquence when we know how constant and unremitting were the labours in which they had been occupied; when we know how proud Paul was of those labours, how he boasted of them as the crowning proof of his freedom, his devotion, his love. This eloquence grows even more commanding, as we learn that the labour of his hands was

* I Cor. iv. 11, 12.

† Acts xx. 17—38.

both excessive and ill-paid, for though the apostle worked night and day, he often "wanted," suffering "both hunger and thirst;" and that even the scanty pittance he earned was often given to this friend or that, to help Luke in a difficulty, perhaps, or to equip Timothy for a journey. And I think it lends the crowning grace to St. Paul's labours, if we may read the sentence, "These hands have ministered to *my necessities, and to them that were with me,*" as some of our best scholars do read it. They say that the very construction of the Greek sentence shews—the very fact that Paul says, not "to my necessities, and the necessities of my companions," but "to my necessities, and to my companions,"—that he meant to imply that *his friends were among his necessities*, that he could not live without them, that in ministering to them he was ministering to himself. What a royal heart this poor working man must have had! In want, he gives; and gives with a grace which makes his friends feel that, in accepting, they confer a favour. Truly St. Paul, more than any other man, realized to the full, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Now we have all been familiar with the fact that St. Paul was a tent-maker, and that at times he earned his subsistence by the toils of his craft. But it may be that we have not hitherto noticed how often he alludes to his manual labours, how much of his time and thoughts they engrossed. The passages I have cited teach us that he was a working man in a far stricter sense than is commonly supposed. They teach us that he was engaged in the more common and toilsome branches of a toilsome craft; that his labours were protracted and exhausting; that he "toiled and travailed" in them, "working night and day;" and that his labours were ill-paid, since despite his industry, and the long hours he bent over the "cilicium," he often "wanted" the common

necessaries of life. "Suffering both hunger and thirst," it was not often, I am afraid, that he could minister to "them that were with him."

And now that we have ascertained him to be a working man who often felt the pinch of want, let us learn a lesson or two from this conception of him.

One lesson—*the dignity of labour*—lies on the very surface of it. Among those born of women none is greater than St. Paul. He wrought hard at his craft; and, therefore, hard manual labour cannot be inconsistent with true greatness. Than St. Paul no man has ever been more worthy of "the grand old name of gentleman;" and therefore mechanical toils are not necessarily degrading. It is not inevitable that working men should be rude, rough, coarse; that they should be lacking in refinement and courtesy. Few sights are more painful than such a group of skilled artisans—bricklayers, carpenters, coopers, painters, smiths—as may be seen any day. Their loud harsh tones, their coarse jests and uncouth manners, sometimes too their insolence to inoffensive passers-by, their brutal treatment of each other, their greedy improvidence and their drunken waste degrade them to a point at which they become well-nigh insufferable. They might be gentlemen, in the best sense of that much-abused word; and they are hardly men. And they cannot fairly, as unfairly they often do, attribute these faults to the nature of their work. St. Paul worked as hard as any of them. His work was as coarse, and rough, and exhausting as theirs. The thick haircloth he had to handle was tough and intractable as leather: and hence one of the Greek Fathers calls St. Paul *σκητοτόμος*, or "leather-cutter," and one of the Latin Fathers calls him *sutor*, or "shoemaker." Yet with this rough dirty work to do, St. Paul was the truest gentleman of his time—the most courteous, generous, constant, kind. This mechanic, this toil-worn "leather-cutter,"

had the manners of a prince, and far finer manners than most of the princes of this world. If our workmen, or many of them, are so degraded that to be mechanical is to be base, if their manners are as rough as their work, the degradation is voluntary.

A skilled artisan is in some respects the most fortunate of men. If he is sober, industrious, trustworthy, obliging, as well as skilful, what master will part with him? what master is not glad to have and to retain him? He is as sure of employment and a comfortable subsistence as, in this uncertain world, any man can be. He is useful and welcome anywhere. Drop him down in any city in the world, and there is work waiting for him. And in many cases he has this immense advantage over those who do not work with their hands, that the very labour by which he earns his bread yields him the exercise by which he is kept in health. The great difficulty with those who work only or mainly with their brains is, how to secure the time and means for the physical exertion indispensable to a healthy condition of mind and body. It is a difficulty before which they daily succumb.

There is no need therefore to pity St. Paul because he had to work with his hands. I make no doubt that his handicraft labours were very wholesome for him,—wholesome, for the sense of independence and security which they engendered; wholesome, for the tax they laid on his physical energies and his dexterity of hand; wholesome, for the new turn they gave his thoughts. If they helped instead of degrading him, why should they enbrute and degrade the working man of to-day? I know of only one reason why they should degrade us: it is because we think them degrading. In St. Paul's day, when rabbis, and statesmen, and princes worked with their hands, or had worked with them, or were capable of working with them, no

man was degraded by manual toils. As yet, on this point, we are not so highly civilized as the Jews of nineteen centuries ago. The barbarous prejudices of feudal times still cling to us. We talk much and eloquently of the dignity of labour; but it is a dignity we do not much covet for ourselves.

Can we wonder that a class which is rudely treated should be rude? that those who are thought to be low, vulgar, boorish, should become what they are thought to be? Of what use is it for us to speak of "the dignity of labour," when we should hold ourselves to be degraded if that dignity were conferred upon us? To what avail do we sing hymns of praise to the working man through all our newspaper throats, while we shrink from more contact with him than we can help, while our whole bearing shews that we value any man who can live without work more than the man who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow?

There can be no doubt, then, that our mechanics and artisans stand at one great disadvantage as compared with St. Paul "the tent-maker." With us, men who live by manual toil cease to be called "men;" they are only "hands." Mechanical labours are not respected as they were. They are held to be impossible to a gentleman, inconsistent with habits of courtesy, refinement, and culture. To the working men who resent that unworthy estimate of their vocation, could my voice reach them, I would say,—Shut your ears to merely eloquent laudations. "Who would be free, himself must strike the blow." Rely on yourselves. Every class has to work out its own social redemption. Lawyers, doctors, clergymen, authors, artists, were once little more than the serfs of princes and the great. You did not do much to emancipate them. They had to win their own way to public esteem. The nobles had to *take* from the king the power they have long wielded. The middle classes had to *take* the political power which the aristocracy withheld

from them so long as they dared. And you must prove your vocation an honourable one before it will be honoured. Honour it *yourselves*. Shew that a man may labour with his hands, and labour for a wage, without being coarse, rude, improvident, uncultivated ; that a mechanic is not necessarily a rough insolent fellow at war with all other classes ; that an artisan may have a wise head, and a warm heart, and gentle, courteous manners ; that he may be faithful, reliable, generous, considerate, kind. Take St. Paul for your model. His life, like yours, was a life of toil and travail. He worked night and day at a craft no more, and no less, honourable than yours. And he was simply—always saving Him who was more than man—the noblest man and the most courteous gentleman the world has ever seen.

Again. The facts of St. Paul's life as a working man yield us some valuable hints on *certain possibilities of Christian service*. He was a mechanic. He wrought at hard, rough, ill-paid work. Through we know not what fluctuations of circumstance—partly too, no doubt, through the distractions of his apostleship—he could not at times get enough of this work to do, or could not earn enough for his support.

We all know that St. Paul endured a great fight of afflictions. We have been accustomed to think of his life as full of pains, toils, dangers, calamities ; but we have also been accustomed to attribute his perils and sufferings to the persecutions which befell him as an apostle of Christ. It is pathetic, it touches us close home, to learn that some of these sufferings came upon him as a working man, from the fact that he was out of work, or that work was slack, or that wages were low ; that he knew what it was to have an empty purse and a bare cupboard. The labours and trials of an apostle are not for us, any more than his honours and rewards ; but the trials and endurances of the mechanic touch and affect us all. We know what it is, or

we think we know what it must be, to long for work and get none, to mark the gradual approaches of want, to fold in compulsory idleness hands used to labour and willing to labour ; and it brings Paul very near to us to learn that these trials were his as well as our own.

How did he bear himself under these trials? He held his peace. He says to the Corinthians, "When I was present with you, and *wanted*, I was chargeable to no man." Even in that strait he would not ask help of those who were so forward to suspect his motives. I do not suppose that they so much as knew of his want till it was past. And St. Paul was too proud to tell them of a need which they should never have suffered to exist ; though he was not too proud to accept the help which the kind thoughtful Philippians sent him by "the brethren who came from Macedonia : " he remembered *them*, and how they had supplied his necessities to the very end of his life.

St. Paul knew the blessedness of receiving ; he also knew the higher blessedness of giving. As we have seen, one reason that he was always poor, and sometimes in want, was, that he counted his friends among his necessities, that he worked "for them that were with him " as well as for himself, that he never let them want if he could supply their want.

It lends the crowning charm to his labours and necessities that, while working night and day at his craft, he was not only spending his substance on others, but also "squandering himself," exhausting brain and nerve and heart, in the endeavour to give the Gospel to men whom he loved, even though they did not love him. If ever any man might have thought himself excused from serving the Church, it was this hard-pressed mechanic, whose nightly and daily toil left him in want. Yet St. Paul was not a whit behind the chiefest apostles ; nay, in labours for Christ and the Church he was "more abundant than them all." Weary with his

rough work, starving on his scanty gains, knowing that he must come back to labours that would extend far into the night, he dragged himself evening by evening to the synagogue, or to the house of Justus, that he might teach and argue of the things of Christ. Never, I apprehend, was he more constant or more ardent in the ministry of his apostleship than during the eighteen months he spent at Corinth; yet it was in these very months that he "wanted," that he lacked even bread and wine.

And here lies our lesson. For St. Paul was in the very circumstances which we often plead as an excuse, as a sound and valid reason, for our neglects of duty. He was worn out with work, and yet he served; he was destitute, and yet he gave. Think of him, dropping awl and thread and shears after a heavy day's toil, and hastening to the house of worship, to reason with Jews and Greeks and persuade them that Jesus was the Christ, although he knew that, the service over, he must return to sit up half or all the night at an occupation which barely furnished him with bread! Think of him as delighting thus to spend himself in the service of God and man; and compare our conduct with his, our love with his!

We do not dream of leaving our work for the House of Worship, though we should have only to listen instead of to speak. Nay, even on the one day of the week on which we are released from our customary toils, we often find ourselves "not well enough" or "too tired" to attend public worship, and much too exhausted even to think of reasoning with the hearers about us, and persuading them to think of Christ. We may not have to work so hard as Paul worked, and indeed very few of us have to "toil and travail night and day;" we may not be in want, or in fear of it; we may not be of a feeble body much marred by disease: but, nevertheless, we cannot do a tithe of what he did for the Church and for the Lord of

the Church. So far from delighting to squander and exhaust ourselves in the service of Christ, most of us do not so much as entertain the thought of sacrificing any of our gains, or our health, or our ease, that we may testify to Him.

St. Paul's utter devotion to his Master is a rebuke to us all; but it is the very gravest of rebukes to those who, professing and calling themselves Christians, can encounter any toils of business or pleasure, but are always too weary or too occupied to serve the Church; who usually find the means for schemes of recreation and gain, but are as generally too poor to contribute to the wants of their neighbours. For here was a man, sometimes starving, often in want, yet forward to help and to give. Here was a man worn with handicraft toils, yet always fresh and vigorous for the ministration of truth and charity, always delighted to lavish his energies in any endeavour to teach men wisdom or to do them good. Why should that have been possible to him, an old feeble mechanic, which is impossible to us? It was possible simply because "the labour we delight in physics pain;" because he loved Christ more than we do, and cared less for his own comfort and ease. Let us, then, seek more of his spirit; for it is the very spirit of Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give *his life* a ransom for the many.

XXXI

St. Paul as a Friend.

2 TIMOTHY IV. II.

THE craving for sympathy, for friendship, for love, of which we are all conscious, springs from that in us which is likest God : "for God is love, and love is of God." Even the happy and almighty Lord, dwelling in the solitudes of eternity, knew this craving ; or why did He create the myriads of intelligent beings who people the universe, and ask them to love Him ? Even He who was perfect Man, no less than perfect God, knew this craving, and that in the supreme crisis of his earthly life ; for when He was in an agony, and his soul was exceeding sorrowful, He begged his friends to watch with Him ; nay, came to them again and again with the same request, as though to be alone in his agony was more than even He could bear. As for St. John, who of all men perhaps was most like Christ, his days were a mere round of love in the still contemplative life to which he seems for long years, and of necessity, to have devoted himself ; while his ministry was a mere homily on the text, "Little children, love one another." No perfection of friendship would surprise us in him ; it would seem only the natural expression of a soul wholly possessed by the Divine charity.

But there are men, men too of a very high order, of whom we do not expect the delicate refinements of a devoted personal friendship. A great statesman, for instance, often gives

himself to large public ends with a singleness of purpose which swallows up all care for his private affairs, all craving for private personal affections. Hardened by the toils and conflicts of public life, we hardly expect such men to prove model friends, to keep their hearts tremblingly sensitive to every breath of passion, to the purest and most delicate impact of private regard. If by any chance we learn that amid the strenuous labours of their ministry, their unceasing absorbing care for vast public interests, they have kept their hearts fresh, tender, open ; or that in the solitude which they, lifted so high above their fellows, were compelled to walk, they craved the responses of love and friendship,—such a chance strikes us with pathetic surprise.

It is a kindred surprise which awaits every student of St. Paul's life and ministry. Here is a man to all appearance absorbed in labours, endurances, conflicts, sorrows so numerous and vast as to be well-nigh incredible. The whole Church, the whole world, lies on his heart. He devotes himself to the largest public interests with an ardour that never abates. Incessant and exhausting demands are made on a constitution naturally infirm. It is a miracle that he does not sink under his enormous burden of toil and care. With that crushing weight upon him, how shall he be free to move with quick delicate step through the complexities of private affection ? With the whole world in his heart, how shall he keep an inner shrine sacred to the feet of personal friends ? The multitude throng him ; how then shall he be sensitive to the gentle hesitating touch of a friendship which ventures only to lay a finger on the hem of his garment ? As we contemplate him in his public aspects, he rises and towers before us like one of the lofty rugged mountains which uphold the earth, turning mighty currents of healing air, and pouring down a vast fertilizing stream on the plains below. But we do not expect the rapid and voluminous stream to

single out one flower that grows on its banks for a special caress, or the mighty breeze to visit this or that cheek with a peculiar gentleness. The tiny brooklet, which has but few flowers to cherish, may linger over each of them, or the gentle zephyr which springs up on its bosom only to die in the moment of its birth ; but not the mountain stream, not the mountain air-current. How can St. Paul, who preaches to nations and loves all men, single out this person or that for special affection, or yield himself to the anxieties and fears of a profound personal love ? The man must be sunk, lost, in the apostle, private friendship in the service of the world.

So, at least, we should naturally conclude. And therefore it is with an ever-deepening sense of wonder we find, as we study his life, that the man lives in the apostle,—that none of the most refined fears, cares, joys, cravings, tendernesses of the most passionate human friendship are unknown to him. Nothing, indeed, in the whole range of his writings is more striking or more pathetic than the friendly phrases which constantly recur, and which breathe the very spirit of tender yearning and desire. As we accumulate such phrases as, "*Only Luke* is with me," "*No man* stood by me," "I thought it good to be left at Athens *alone*," and "I have no man likeminded with *him*," we feel that we are permitted to look into one of the most sensitive of human hearts, a heart ever craving sympathy and love. Such phrases, and the scenes to which they refer us, reveal *the man* to us and make him dear to us. Were we to analyse our feeling for St. Paul, I believe we should find that we love and admire him as we do, even more on account of the passion and tenderness which we share with him, than for the apostolic gifts and achievements which lift him so far above us. Let us briefly glance at a few of these phrases, and acquaint ourselves a little more exactly with *the Friend* they disclose.

"*Only Luke is with me !*" What a sigh there is in the

words! *Only* Luke, when the apostle yearns to have so many of his friends daily with him. St. Paul is in prison, or rather in the little hut or cabin he had hired for himself in the prætorium of Rome, and is chained night and day to one of the prætorian guards. Despite his chain, he has been very busy and very happy in his confinement. He has written Epistles to many of the Churches. Friends and fellow-labourers to the number of at least a score or two, have been constantly coming and going, to tell him how the Churches fare. As a rule, his hut must have been full of friends; and in his intercourse with them he has tasted a pleasure so pure and high that his bonds have been forgotten. But when he writes to Timothy, it happens that all have left him save his physician, Luke. Now Luke was a friend after St. Paul's own heart,—an accomplished scholar with a pen always at the apostle's service, a fellow-labourer in the Lord of the most approved wisdom and devotion. Yet St. Paul is not content. There is a vein of profound sadness in the verses * in which he enumerates the friends who had left him. "Demas," he says, not without a touch of indignation and resentment, "has *deserted* me, having loved this present world. Crescens has gone to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia. Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus; Erastus stayed at Corinth; Trophimus I left at Miletus sick. And here I sit, a prisoner, with only Luke to comfort me." And so he prays Timothy to do his best to come to him at once, and, if possible, to bring Mark with him.

It is impossible to read these verses without feeling how deep and constant was St. Paul's craving for human fellowship and intercourse. God is with him. Work presses on him beyond measure. Still he longs for friends. A friend, than whom none loved him better or served him more faithfully, is at his side; still he craves to have with him other

* 2 Tim. iv. 10-12.

friends no less dear. His heart is large enough for them all. He is conscious of a vacancy, "an aching void," when any one of them is absent.

The same feeling comes out, in another form, in subsequent verses of this Chapter. He had been called to answer to the first count of the accusation laid against him (it was Nero's practice to take each count on separate occasions *) before the tyrant Nero ; as he conceived it, to beard the lion in his very den.† And he complains,‡ "At my first defence *no man stood forward with me*, but all abandoned me ; I pray that it be not laid to their charge. Nevertheless the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me, and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth." Had, then, Luke, and Tychicus, and Titus, as well as Demas, deserted the apostle in this critical strait? We do not know; we cannot tell. From certain technical words here employed by the apostle, we may infer him to mean only that, it being so perilous a task even to seem on his side, no *advocate* would plead his cause, no *procurator* aid him in arranging his evidence, no *patron* intercede on his behalf. It is certain that in the Roman, as in the Greek courts, the friends of a prisoner were allowed to appeal to the judge for mercy, and seek to move him by their cries and tears. Probably, St. Paul expected that the Roman Church would thus manifest its sympathy with him, and was grieved and wounded by their absence or their silence. Possibly, even his personal friends, through mistake or through fear, failed to speak for him. But, whatever the special allusion of his words, we can see that they express grief and resentment ; they tell us that at least some of whom he had expected succour and sympathy had failed him at the time of need. He is hurt by their lack of fidelity. He cannot endure to be thus left alone when other trials are awaiting

Suet. "Nero," 15.

† 2 Tim. iv. 17.

‡ Ibid. iv. 16. 17.

him; and therefore he once more* begs Timothy, as the dearest and most attached of his friends, to do his utmost to come to him, and, if it be any way possible, to come "before the winter," which was close at hand.

We have another illustration of his craving for friendship, his dependence on human intercourse and sympathy, in the narrative of that journey which terminated in the Roman prison. The Christians of Rome had long desired to see Paul. When they heard that he was coming, that he had arrived in Italy, a prisoner, and hardly escaped from shipwreck, they went out to meet him. One company of them encountered him at Appii Forum, a town where travellers stopped to unload their mules, and whose streets were full of low tavern-keepers and bargemen. A second company welcomed him ten miles farther on, at a cross-road known, for obvious reasons, as the Three Taverns. "*And when Paul saw the brethren*" † who had come to meet him, and who, no doubt, were full of eager sympathy and good-will, "*he thanked God, and took courage.*" Old friends whom he had met in Asia were among these brethren, and friends whom he had never seen before, but whose hearts were full of love and admiration for the great apostle, "the ambassador in bonds;" but all are glad to see him, and make much of him, and his heart grows light and strong within him. As he glances at their wistful eager faces, and clasps their warm friendly hands, he thanks God and takes courage.

How can we help being touched by such incidents as this? They set this great hero and champion of the Faith before us as a man of like passions with ourselves. He feels as we should have felt. He is dejected and inspirited by the very causes which tell on us. Like us, he sees all things in "hues borrowed from the heart." God is not nearer to him, nor more truly with him, now that he has reached Appii Forum,

* 2 Tim. iv. 21.

† Acts xxviii. 15.

or the Three Taverns, than He was before ; his chains are not removed ; the soldiers still surround and watch him : but he has met attached and pitying friends, and his chains grow lighter, and *their* love deepens the sense of God's love within his soul.

Of the innumerable other illustrations which suggest themselves, we select only two, and these more special and personal in their tone. St. Paul, I think, loved Timothy before any other of his friends ; and that not simply because he had won him to the faith and service of Christ—he had many other friends who owed even their own souls to him ; but of Timothy he always speaks with peculiar tenderness, and once* he expressly affirms that he knew no man “of an equal soul” with him. Timothy was with the apostle at Athens. While he sojourned and laboured in that city, St. Paul heard that his recent converts at Thessalonica had been called to endure a great fight of afflictions, that they were troubled and persecuted on every side ; and that some of them, if not falling away from the Faith, were slipping into errors both of doctrine and practice.

Now we know enough of the apostle, and of his fatherly anxiety for the Churches he had planted, to be sure that such tidings would fill him with care and grief, that he would be willing to lay down his life to save the Thessalonians from their peril. Yet, though he would not have counted his life dear unto him if, by losing it, he might save them, there was one thing—as we should think, a much lesser thing—which he found it very hard to do. It was to send the only friend he then had with him to Thessalonica with instruction and advice. We could hardly have believed that the apostle would have hesitated to do anything which the service of Christ and the cure of souls demanded of him, had he not told us with his own mouth that he did hesitate. But he has

* Phil. ii. 20.

told us. If we turn to 1 Thess. iii. 1—8, we find his own account of the conflict he had with himself before he could determine to send Timothy to Thessalonica and be left alone at Athens. He has already told the Thessalonians how grieved he was to hear such sorrowful news of them, that he *would* have come to them if he could, that he had desired to see their face with great desire, that he had tried to come again and again, but had always been hindered. He goes on to say that now at last *when he could no longer forbear*, only, as the words imply, when the imperative sense of duty had overmastered the exigencies of personal feeling, he had sent Timothy—had determined “to be left alone at Athens”—that his friend might establish and comfort them in the Faith. How long and sharp the conflict was before he could consent to let Timothy leave him, we may infer from the fact that twice in a few sentences, once in verse 1, and again in verse 5, he repeats the phrase, “when I could no longer forbear.” In his dread of losing the only friend he had with him, he *had* forborne as long as he could, had put off parting with him, had tried to hope that there would be no need to part with him.

That throws new light on the character of the apostle, does it not? To me it seems to set him closer to us, and make him dearer to us; for it shews that even the heroic Paul found duty hard, even as we find it hard. He *did* it, but he hesitated about doing it; he had to compel himself to do it: it pained and grieved his heart to do it. Nothing, indeed, would be more base than to take pleasure in pulling a great man down to our own low level. But, on the other hand, nothing can well be better or more animating for us than to feel that, great as he is, he is nevertheless a man. Nor do we degrade St. Paul to any low level by saying—rather, by acknowledging, for it is he who says it—that he found it hard to do his duty, if only we remember what it was that made

it hard, and that, however hard it was, he did it. It was nothing but his pure deep love for Timothy, nothing but his profound craving for the human sympathy which made the Divine sympathy real and present to him, that led him to demur and hesitate before he could determine to send his "son" away and to be left alone. The apostle does not suffer in our thoughts, for he discharges the ministry of his apostleship at the very greatest cost and loss ; and if *the apostle* does not suffer, how much does *the man* gain, and *the friend* ! Who would have thought, if he had not told us, that St. Paul was so tender and devoted in his personal attachments, that to sacrifice these, or the temporary enjoyment of them, was the sacrifice which he found it most difficult to make ? Instead of lowering, it elevates our conception of Paul to learn that he, who had "left" all else, also left *love*, the profoundest and most sensitive human love, for Christ's sake and the Gospel's.

We have an almost parallel instance in 2 Cor. vii. From that Epistle we know into what a tumult of grief and anxiety the apostle was thrown when tidings came that his converts at Corinth were departing from the Faith. Some of them had fallen into gross and notorious immorality ; others were denying the very incarnation and resurrection of Christ. Some were abusing their freedom ; others were striving to impose the yoke of the law on their brethren : and a few were suspecting and ridiculing the apostle himself, insinuating that he was actuated by sinister motives, sneering at his rhetoric as contemptible, and at the meanness of his "presence." He writes his First Epistle to them, arguing, reproving, beseeching,—exhausting himself in appeals to their reason and conscience and heart. No sooner is the letter dispatched than he grows restless with apprehension ; he fears that it will do harm rather than good. His fears so goad and prick him that he cannot stay at Ephesus, or indeed in

any other city. He sends Titus to Corinth, to ascertain and report how his letter has been received. He bids Titus meet him, as quickly as he can, in Macedonia. He wanders from city to city, finding no rest. At times he "repents" that he had written a letter which could not fail to cause much grief. He is overwhelmed with disappointment when in city after city he inquires for Titus in vain. And at length, when Titus reaches him with happy tidings, he breaks into a passion of love and grief, ruth and thankfulness, which we may trace in every paragraph, and almost every sentence, of his Second Epistle.

But the point we have to mark is that which comes out in the seventh Chapter. As we read it, it is really almost impossible to tell whether his friend Titus, or his converts at Corinth, are most in his mind and heart. It is one of the most impassioned utterances in all literature. Now he glories in the Corinthians. They fill him with comfort to overflowing, with joy to painful excess. And, again, he grieves that he should ever have grieved them, and can only console himself with the happy effects of their grief—that it was a sorrow to repentance and life. In one verse he begs them to forgive and receive him; in another, he is lost in admiration of the virtues they have displayed. In short, he lays bare his whole heart to us, and we see in what a tumult of fervid passionate excitement it was. Yet, beneath all this grief and joy, this intense sympathy with the Corinthians, there runs and heaves an undercurrent of feeling for Titus hardly less passionate and intense. The mere coming of Titus had been a great comfort to him; and not only his coming, but the assurance that the Corinthians had been kind to Titus, and had comforted *him*. "I was comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more I rejoiced for the joy of Titus, because *his* spirit was refreshed by you all." In the frankness of confidential talk, Paul had often boasted to Titus of the

Corinthians,—how good they were, how gifted, how kind ; and now it is an inexpressible happiness to him that his boasts have been verified—"if I have boasted to him of you I am not ashamed;" and that Titus has learned to love them "with a deep inward affection." And thus throughout the Chapter he makes much of the Corinthians and much of Titus, till we cannot say whether we more admire the apostle or love the friend.

It would be easy to adduce many other passages in which St. Paul's friendship, his deep constant craving for human sympathy, and his quick ardent responses to every touch of personal affection, find utterance in forms quite as striking and beautiful as those at which we have glanced. But, perhaps, these will suffice. Taken from different periods of his life they all breathe a most tender, loving, passionate spirit, and prove that he was not less excellent as a friend than as a servant and minister of the truth.

Such a view of St. Paul's character shews in what spirit *we* should fill the human relation into which love enters. No austere eremite of the woods, no recluse bent only on saving his own soul, could possibly have spoken the words we have heard St. Paul speak. For Simon Stylites to have uttered them would have been more difficult than to have grovelled in his filth on the pillar's top for thirty years. To hate men, to shrink from them, to break away from any natural human ties on plea of serving God, is alien to the spirit of the Gospel. St. Paul, the greatest exponent of the Gospel, teaches us to seek perfection by loving men and serving them. From him we learn to open our hearts to all affection, to prove that we are good Christians by shewing that we are good friends.

This, however, is a common and familiar truth. Let us touch a lesson more special and germane. Youth is the

season of friendship. Then we most easily yield ourselves to the attractions of whatever is admirable, or seems admirable to us, and are most easily moved to love whatever seems great or good or fair. But when we have grown harder with years, we are a little apt to look down on the feelings natural to that period as *romantic* in the bad sense—as vain, illusory, dangerous. Parents, for example, will often, not simply try to save their children from injurious friendships and attachments, but will distrust the sincerity of their feelings, and sneer at friendship and love as things of no account. And thus they often wound sensitive hearts with a pain of the intensity of which they have no conception, or breed a selfish scepticism and hardness with which they are afterward shocked ; meaning kindness, they are often most unkind. We cannot for a moment suppose that St. Paul would have taken that tone. Himself as keen and sensitive and faithful a friend as ever man had, all human friendship and love were sacred to him. He could not have spoken of them with a sneer. He would have respected them even when they were excessive or wrongly placed. *He* would have said, “This pure holy feeling is given to be the spring and blessing of your life. It is too precious to be lavished on unworthy objects, or to be too hastily bestowed.”

But if parents and guardians are sometimes to blame, young persons, in the fervent period when attachments are most natural and most graceful, often take up what are really romantic and impracticable notions. They admire, let us say, some person of their own sex—*their own sex*, since that may save us from dubious interpretations. They hear and read and talk much of loyalty and devotion. Their friend is, and ought to be, everything to them. To love any one else as they do him or her, would be a sin against love, a sort of infidelity. And, indeed, there are vain and selfish persons of all ages who fall into this or a similar mistake.

They must have their friend all to themselves. *They* may have more friends than one, but none of their friends must have any friend but themselves. They even think jealousy a part of love, instead of its death, or a proof that their love has been love of self and not of some one else.

All these fancies and their kin—and they play a large and tragical part in many lives—are rebuked by the example of St. Paul. If he shrank from being left alone, he also shrank from being left with only one friend. “Only Luke is with me!” he sighs to Timothy: “do your best to come to me, that I may at least have two friends with me; and bring Mark, if you can, that I may have three.” His heart was large enough to hold many friends. And, as we have seen, while he loved them, and that most tenderly, for their own sakes, he loved them most of all because their friendship made God’s friendship more real to him, because their love brought home to him the love of God.

Only the love of good men could do that. And hence, in the whole circle of his personal friends, we find none but good men—none of his Hebrew or Greek fellow-students who had rejected the Gospel, for example, but only men and women who, if not eminent in capacities and gifts, loved Christ and gave themselves to the service of man. Hence, too, it was that, when human love failed him, he could rest in the love of Christ; when no man stood by him as he confronted the lion, he could feel that the Lord stood by him, and strengthened him, and delivered him out of the lion’s mouth.

If therefore we take this most true and tender friend for our example, we shall learn from him how to choose our friends: that only those who are good, who love God and man, will be able to fulfil the highest offices of friendship for us; that so soon as anything wrong or base creeps into our relations with others, our friendship with them becomes a snare and a

peril. We shall also learn that, strong as our craving for human sympathy and affection may be, and right as it is for us to make friends of men, the true Friend, the best Friend, is He who will stand by us when men desert us, who can go with us when men cannot accompany us, if they would. The great Friend—the Friend who sticketh closer than a brother, closer even than “Brother Paul,” is He who will be with us in life, and death, and after death; and all other friendships are valuable to us in proportion *as* they lead us to Him and keep us with Him.

THE END.

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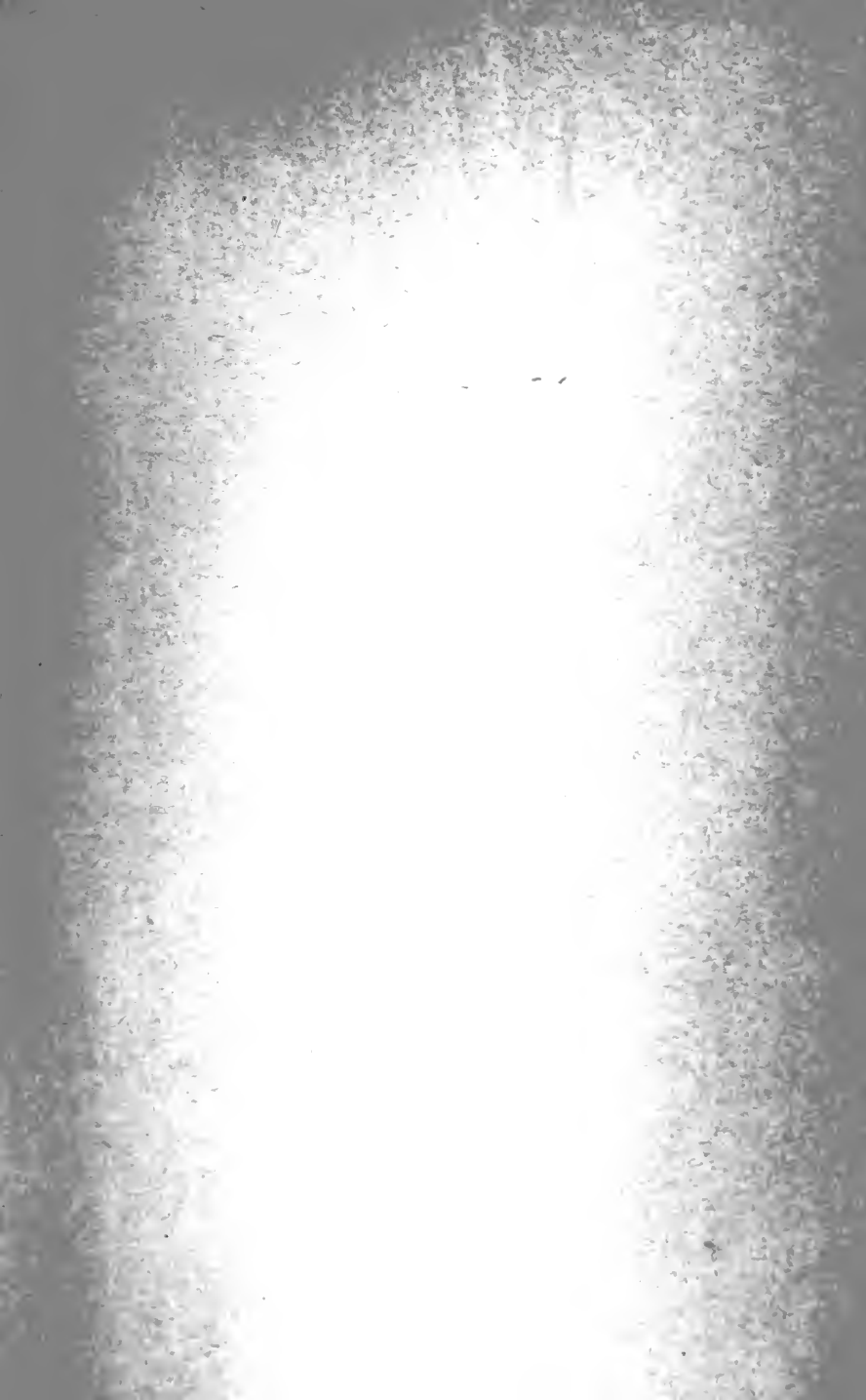
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